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AMERICAN AND BRITISH
AUTHORS.

VOL. 73.

JOYCE DORMER'S STORY.

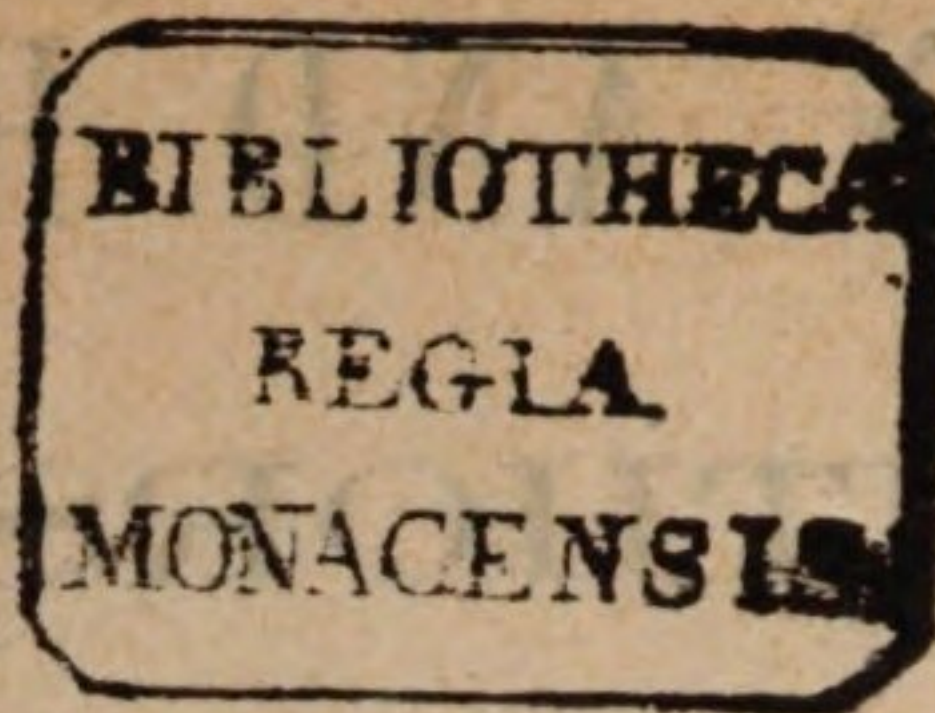
BY

JULIA GODDARD,
AUTHOR OF "ADRIANA", ETC.

VOL. I.

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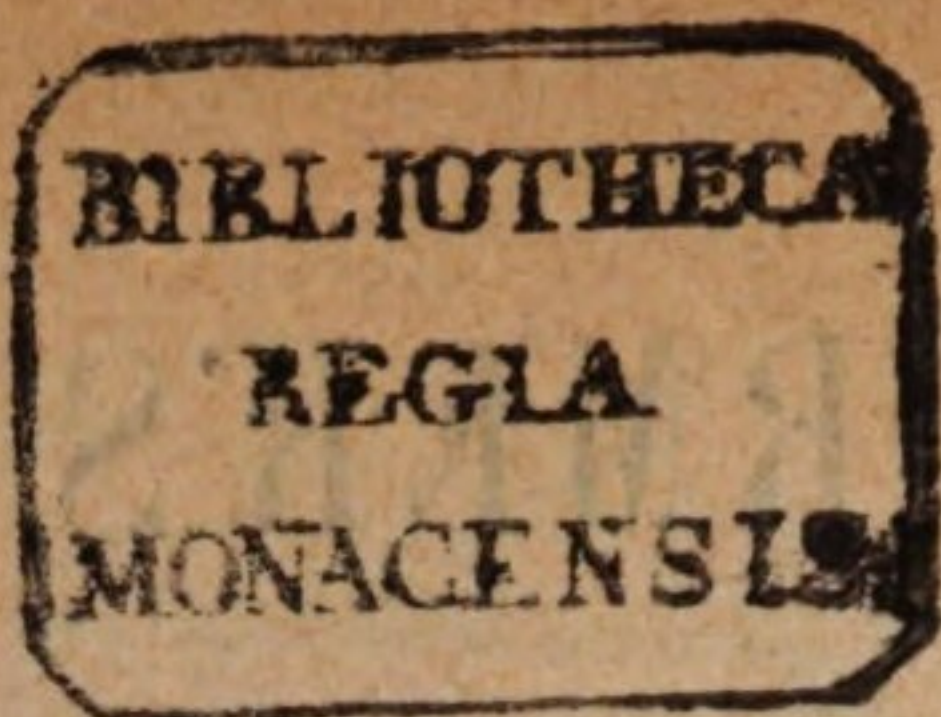
AUTHOR OF "ADRIANA", ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

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JOYCE DORMER'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

THE master and mistress of Green Oake were seated in their drawing-room when Joyce Dormer entered.

When I say the mistress, I make use of a mere form of speech, for Mrs. Carmichael had but little voice in the management of the household. She was a short, plump, submissive-looking woman, with ruddy cheeks and hair that was neither thin nor grey, despite the years that had rolled over her head; and this still luxuriant hair curled in tiny ringlets beneath the borders of her blonde cap.

Why she had married Mr. Carmichael had always been a mystery to her family, since he was a man to whom none of them had ever taken kindly. He was a person of essentially cold exterior, who never seemed to connect himself with them in any way, or to emerge from the ice in which

he was imbedded. He was rather an appendage, tacked on by stitches, that appeared in constant danger of giving way, than one who was now part and parcel of the family circle.

No one knew whence he originally came; he turned up, as people sometimes do, and gave out that he had made money in Australia, and had returned to the old country to enjoy it; and, inasmuch as he could substantially prove his wealth to be no fiction, it was of course believed in.

He also gave out that he had fallen in love with Miss Charlotte Dormer, and as he made her an offer of marriage every one was bound to believe that that was true also. And as Miss Charlotte Dormer accepted him, it was naturally to be supposed that she had fallen in love also, at least it was to be hoped so, since, in due time, she became Mrs. Carmichael.

In spite of the veil that was thrown over Mr. Carmichael's early history, he was looked upon as a man who was not to be altogether lightly esteemed. He was a man of substance, and the possessor of very fair landed estate. Moreover, he was a stanch supporter of church-rates, and always plumped for the Conservative candidate at the county elections; both of which proceedings were considered vouchers of extreme respectability. Indeed, Mr. Carmichael's characteristic might be said to be eminent respectability. And, doubtless, regarding him from this point

of sight, Miss Charlotte Dormer's kinsfolk and acquaintance thought it a lucky day for her when she became Charlotte Carmichael. Still he did not make much headway with the Dormer connection, nor did he act as though it was his intention to keep up any very intimate relation with them.

Periodically, as in duty bound, Mrs. Carmichael paid a visit to one or other member of her family, and on these occasions Mr. Carmichael brought her and fetched her away, though he never remained with her during her stay. If possible, he would leave on the day that he arrived; but if this were not possible, he would take his departure as early as he conveniently could on the day following.

In event of his staying over a night, it was customary to have a state party, to which all the available Dormer clan were invited, together with the squire and his lady, and the vicar and his wife. And, as the squire was a pompous man, with whom the Dormer clan were not on the most intimate terms, it was supposed that the frigidity which pervaded these entertainments was attributable to his presence, for it was not for a moment to be allowed that such a highly creditable connection as Mr. Carmichael could cast a gloom over the family circle. And yet, if each one had spoken freely the thought of his or her heart, it would have been found that Mr. Carmichael, and not the squire, was in fault; though out of courtesy to Mrs. Carmichael, who was a general favourite, such an opinion was never mooted.

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This chilling influence, which seemed to emanate from him, made itself manifest as he advanced to greet Joyce Dormer, a fair, quiet-looking person, whom one scarcely knew whether to term a girl or a woman.

"I do not remember you," said Mr. Carmichael extending two fingers of his flabby hand; "you must have been a mere child when I was last at Credlington. What is the name of *your* niece?" he asked, with a strong emphasis on the possessive pronoun, turning to his wife.

"Joyce," she answered.

"Joyce," repeated Mr. Carmichael, and he paused; then, after a moment's reflection, he added, "Joyce Anne, or Joyce Elizabeth, or Joyce Jane, or——?"

"Only Joyce," interrupted the girl, in a low tone.

He looked coldly and sternly at her, but whether in anger at the interruption, or in deprecation of her name, she could not determine.

"I am soory to hear it," said he; "had there been any reasonable second name we might have called you by it. As there is not, it cannot be helped, though I must remark that I consider Joyce as an exceedingly inappropriate name for a young woman."

"My mother's name was Joyce," observed Mrs. Carmichael, timidly.

"I regret that it should have been so, Charlotte," replied her husband, "as it forces upon me the unpleasant con-

viction that her parents could not have been people of sense.”

“My grandfather and my grandmother——” began Mrs. Carmichael; but Mr. Carmichael stopped her.

“Are dead, and therefore we have nothing further to do with them. It is with the living we have to deal, and since your niece has the misfortune to be called Joyce, we must make the best of the circumstance. I presume that it will prove no obstacle to her doing her duty in that state of life into which it hath pleased the Lord in his providence to call her.”

Here Miss Dormer, had she framed her thoughts into speech, would have ejaculated “Hypocrite!” For she was not favourably impressed with her aunt’s husband. But she gave no utterance to her sentiments, and Mr. Carmichael went on as though he were reciting something he had previously noted down.

“Your father,” said he, “died deeply in debt. The house, the household effects, and what little property he was possessed of at the time of his death, are insufficient to meet the demands of his creditors. Therefore you are left dependent on the bounty of your relatives. I have permitted your aunt to offer you a home, and I trust that you will give me no cause to repent a step that I have somewhat against my judgment been induced to take. Whilst under my roof——”

Here Joyce Dormer was about to burst forth indignantly,

and to protest that she would not remain under Mr. Carmichael's roof, but, seeing that she was going to speak, he waved his hand to enforce silence.

"Another day, another day," said he; "I know all that naturally must arise in your heart, but I require no thanks. A good deed is its own reward. Doubtless grateful words fall pleasantly on the ear, but they are a temptation. I would do good for its own sake."

"But you do not understand," began the girl, half choked with indignation.

"Your feelings have overcome you," returned Mr. Carmichael; "I receive your thanks as though they had been spoken. In future, however, remember that I object to scenes. I consider all emotion as to be avoided."

So saying, he left the room.

The girl turned to her aunt.

"Aunt Lotty, Aunt Lotty," said she, for her words came freely now that the chill presence was removed, "I cannot stay here, I will go away, I will do anything—I will be a dressmaker, a housemaid, anything sooner than stay here."

"No, no," answered Mrs. Carmichael, soothingly, "you will understand Mr. Carmichael better when you know him, dear; he is a very good man"—here she looked nervously round—"very upright and conscientious; he felt it his duty to speak openly. He always does, whatever it may cost him."

“He always does, whatever it may cost him,” mentally repeated Joyce; “poor aunt, poor aunt!”

“It was your poor father’s wish, Joyce, that in case anything happened to him, you should come to me. Your father was very fond of me, and I’ve no children of my own, and I feel as if some one who would be like a daughter to me would be a great comfort.”

The girl bent a glance of scrutiny on her aunt, and pondered as to how far trouble might affect her, as it certainly had taken no effect upon her in a personal point of view, for she was no less stout and no less ruddy than she used to be. But then Mrs Carmichael’s temper was placidity itself, and under the tyranny of Mr. Carmichael—for Joyce unhesitatingly assumed that he was a tyrant—she might have fallen into a state of complete and contented slavery.

“Mr. Carmichael’s own niece is coming to live here, is she not?” said Joyce, suddenly, her thoughts flying off in a new direction.

“Yes, dear: but she is a stranger. I never knew that Mr. Carmichael had any relations until about a month since; and then he went down somewhere in the south to see a sister who was dying, and to arrange that Miss Carmichael should come here. He has suddenly found out that there is some large property that ought to be hers, and he’s been writing and writing to his lawyer about it. But I don’t know anything about it, and I never ask Mr. Carmichael

any questions; he does not like it. If there's anything that he wishes me to know, he tells me at the right time, for you see I never could understand much of business matters."

"Miss Carmichael is an heiress then?"

"Yes, dear, but you need not say anything about it. I don't know about it, and I dare say I ought not to talk. Mr. Carmichael has not known about it long, but it seems to occupy him a good deal; and he's very anxious that his niece should be taught something, for I think she's been rather neglected, and he doesn't want to send her to school, and he thought, as you are said to be a clever girl, Joyce, that you'd be a help in the matter; and I was only too thankful to think of having you with me."

Mrs. Carmichael's lips quivered, and two tears stole into her eyes, but she wiped them away immediately, and said that she had a scratching at her throat. Joyce put her arms round her and would have kissed her, but Mrs. Carmichael drew back hastily.

"No, no, dear, don't kiss me; Mr. Carmichael objects to anything demonstrative, and if he should ask me, it will be better to be able to say that we have not kissed each other. But we can love each other all the same."

"We can," returned Joyce, in a determined voice; and it seemed to her as though they were entering into a silent compact against Mr. Carmichael.

"You will like to see your room," said Mrs. Carmichael, leading the way up-stairs.

They mounted a fine old staircase with handsomely carved balustrade, and landed on a long gallery that ran from one end of the house to the other, with doors on either side.

Mrs. Carmichael opened the door of a small room over the porch; it was very plainly furnished, and there was no bed in it.

"You are to sleep here," said Mrs. Carmichael, opening another door to the right of it, and entering a large chamber very handsomely fitted up, which had a communication with the small apartment first mentioned.

"This is Miss Carmichael's room. I believe she is timid and dislikes being alone at nights, so I have moved the little bed out of the porch-room into this corner."

"Yes——"

"And the porch-room you can make into a sitting-room. I hope you will like it," said Mrs. Carmichael, looking anxiously at her niece; "though it's not so well furnished as the large room," and she passed into the smaller chamber where Joyce's two boxes and a portmanteau were standing. "I think you had nothing else," said she.

"Nothing," replied Joyce.

"Well, then, I will leave you to unpack and arrange your affairs."

And Mrs. Carmichael went away.

Two boxes and a portmanteau, there they stood, containing the whole of Joyce Dormer's worldly possessions.

She took out her purse, there was a five-pound note

wrapped up in a piece of paper at one end, and two sovereigns and some silver at the other.

And what was she to do when that was gone? She was an orphan, dependent, as Mr. Carmichael had said, upon the bounty of her relatives. And sitting down she leaned her arms on the window-sill, and her heart filled with grief and indignation.

There is something very soothing in looking upon a beautiful landscape, and Joyce's eye fell upon a very beautiful one. She saw it through an archway made by a couple of majestic beech trees that stood in front of the house. It was a quit country scene, telling of peace and plenty; the corn in the nearer fields was being gathered in; the church was seen in the distance, its grey tower half-concealed in glossy masses of ivy, whose leaves glittered with golden edges as the sunlight fell upon them. Farther away still rose the dark woods already turning grey as evening drew near and the sun sank slowly. Grey, ah, no, not grey, for a hazy cloud of gold seemed to float over them, and their outlines were only just visible through the brilliant veil.

As Joyce steadfastly gazed on the scene before her, it seemed as though some mysterious power were breathing comfort to her soul; as though Mother Earth were whispering, "Peace, peace, art thou not my child? Be comforted, for brightness as well as gloom hath a place in this world."

And the soft wind stealing through the sweet-scented clematis rolled a cloud of rare perfume into the little room,

and was, as it were, incense upon the altar that had risen up before her; and the song of the birds was a far-off chorus, that by its melody lulled asleep the indignation that had been awakened in her breast.

A beautiful butterfly flew in and rested upon the hand that lay quite still upon the window-frame, and when it had remained long enough to rivet her attention to its marvellous coloring, it fluttered its wings and flew upward, upward, until she could see it no longer. Her thoughts soared after it, and rose higher than the gay insect's flight. And she learned two lessons.

Ah! but would all this calm feeling remain in Mr. Carmichael's presence?

Joyce was not sure, but her aunt's quivering lips and her words, "your father wished you to be with me," came into her mind.

"But not with Mr. Carmichael," she added, half interrogatively; "nevertheless, I am determined to make trial for a time of my new home."

Before long Joyce had unpacked and disposed of all her property to her entire satisfaction. The few books were placed on a shelf against the wall: her desk on the round table in front of the window. And from her desk she took a little book that was closed with a lock. It was half filled with writing, the latter part of which was blurred and illegible: short entries, some half a dozen words at a time. It

was the record of the last few months of her sorrow-time, after some twenty years of tranquil happiness.

She took a pen, and on the last blurred page wrote,
“Here endeth a past and buried life.”

And at the top of the next page,
“The diary of a new life.”

Joyce had alwas had a fancy for being an authoress, and her diary was to be her first work.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATIONS NOT ALWAYS EXPLANATORY.

MR. CARMICHAEL, was a man of average height and inclined to be stout. His complexion was whitey-brown, and his hair, which lacked the redundancy of his wife's tresses, dark and lank. His eyes were sharp and bead-like, though he had the faculty of withdrawing all brightness from them, when they would assume a fixed and almost stupid stare. They were so placed in his head as to bring before one the physiognomy of a horse, a peculiarity often noticeable in human faces. His lips, which were very thin, were perhaps his most remarkable feature, as in them lay his chief power of expression. One twitch of them would alter the whole look of his face, though not a muscle in the rest of it should move. Mr. Carmichael almay spoke in a slow monotonous drawl. Seldom, even if excited, did he raise his voice; indeed, if anything, he appeared at such times to speak more slowly and in a lower tone than usual.

He always dressed in black, and wore a white tie, presenting somewhat the appearance of a dissenting minister in comfortable circumstances. Perhaps this style of dress was

in keeping with his general bearing, dress being to some extent the indicator of the inner man. At any rate, it commanded a certain sort of respect from his poorer neighbours, in whose eyes the glossy broadcloth, delicate cambric, and thick gold chain bore unequivocal token of confirmed respectability.

Mr. Carmichael had taken up farming as a pursuit. He had time on his hands which he wished to occupy, and, having a turn for chemistry and no lack of means whereby to try experiments, his crops turned out better than any in the county, and yielded him a good profit in addition to the amusement he derived from their culture.

He had bought Green Oake principally on account of the farm that was to be sold with the estate, for the house was larger than he would otherwise have cared to have. It possessed, too, in the eyes of Mr. Carmichael, another recommendation: it was not within easy distance of neighbours, the only house near being the property of an elderly gentleman, who lived in London, and never came down to it. This house was, therefore, shut up, as its owner, from some caprice or other, refused to let it. Now, Mr. Carmichael disliked society, and therefore felt at Green Oake he could not be called upon to enter into any, as a drive of from ten to fifteen miles might be looked upon as a reasonable excuse for declining a dinner invitation.

But elderly gentlemen cannot live for ever; and in process of time the elderly gentleman in London died, and the estate

passed into the hands of a younger man, a nephew of the deceased.

Mr. Carmichael was exceedingly irate when this came to pass; but, as he could neither prevent the man's dying nor his nephew coming into possession, he was obliged to make the best of it; but he announced to his wife soon after the arrival of the new-comers that he did not intend to visit them.

"I have excellent and unanswerable reasons for this decision, Charlotte, though at present it is not necessary to explain them to you," said he.

Now, Mrs. Carmichael had, in common with most other women, a very fair share of curiosity, and she had already been making inquiries in divers directions, and had discovered that Mr. Gresford Lynn came from abroad, that he had a beautiful wife and three lovely children, the eldest a fine boy, about a year old; the two younger, twin-girls, only a few weeks old. And Mrs. Carmichael's heart yearned after the children; she was devotedly fond of children, and would now and then steal into the cottage of some young mother for the mere gratification of holding the baby in her arms for a moment. But these visits were few and far between, as Mr. Carmichael strongly objected to the poor being visited, on the ground that such visits encouraged pauperism.

Why, Mrs. Carmichael never had had the courage to inquire, nor, if she had made the inquiry, would she have

had the power to argue against it. As Mr. Carmichael had enunciated the sentiment, she was bound to believe in it, for great was her belief in her husband's infallibility.

But now that a neighbour in her own rank in life had arrived with children, and such beautiful children, her heart leaped within her as she pondered over the source of pleasure within her grasp, and her heart sank in proportion as she listened to Mr. Carmichael's announcement.

"Therefore," concluded Mr. Carmichael, "you will in no way take the least notice of these Gresford Lynns."

Mr. Carmichael, being an autocrat, knew that the matter was settled. And therefore Mrs. Carmichael's pleasure was curtailed to looking at Mrs. Gresford Lynn in church, and to seeing the children with their nurses, when she approached nearer than usual the outskirts of Lynncourt.

Within a year of the Gresford Lynns' arrival at their new home, sorrow had visited them; the twin sisters were laid in the grave, and the boy's life was despaired of. However, he recovered from the fever that had carried off the little girls.

Then another child—a boy—was born; and then Mrs. Gresford Lynn's health began to give way. And poor Mrs. Carmichael noted it all from afar, and her sympathetic heart grieved silently that it could offer no aid or succour to her sorrowing neighbour. Mrs. Carmichael was a woman of sympathetic nature, and had no one to lavish it upon, for Mr. Carmichael did not require sympathy. She had, therefore, anticipated Joyce's arrival as the beginning of a new

epoch in her existence; her brother's child would make up to her for the want she had felt throughout her married life.

And being somewhat off her guard, she greeted Joyce, when she came down to breakfast, rather more warmly than was her wont, and was immediately made uncomfortably sensible of it by a short cough from Mr. Carmichael, and the measured tone in which he said,

“Good morning. I hope you have recovered from the fatigues of yesterday.”

Very little conversation took place during breakfast; and when they rose from the table, Mr. Carmichael, turning to his niece, said in a solemn voice—he always spoke in a solemn voice, even about the most trivial matters, and his requests at dinner-time, even to “potatoes,” were like tragic petitions issuing from a sepulchre. (I give this simile because “whited sepulchre” appears rather an appropriate epithet for the master of Green Oake.)

But to return.

Mr. Carmichael said in a solemn voice, “Joyce,—since you must be called Joyce,—put on your hat, and I will show you the new kitchen-garden.”

Joyce put on her hat, but with small expectation of seeing the new kitchen-garden. She felt intuitively that Mr. Carmichael had some other motive for asking her to accompany him. When she had been longer at Green Oake, she found out that Mr. Carmichael had a prejudice in favour of ostensible reasons.

As she expected, the new kitchen-garden was left to the right, and she followed her companion to the willow-walk by the river-side. There he motioned her to sit down.

She sat down, and Mr. Carmichael, sitting beside her, delivered, in the reciting manner of the previous evening, the following speech:

“I am this evening expecting my niece, Miss Carmichael. She is the daughter of a sister of mine, who married a cousin. This accounts for the similarity of name. Her father died when she was an infant, and owing to some family quarrel, I never saw her mother again. Indeed, I had lost sight of her, and supposed her dead. But this was not the case; she died only about a month ago in a remote village in the south of England, and on her death-bed wrote a letter to me, committing her daughter to my charge.”

Here Mr. Carmichael paused, and passed his hand across his forehead, as though he were trying to remember what came next. After a moment he proceeded.

“My sister’s means being limited, she could give the girl no advantages of education: I now wish to make up for this, and yet I do not care to send her to school. I must have my only relative with me,” he sighed. “An only relative is too precious to part with.”

“Sometimes,” observed Joyce, drily.

Mr. Carmichael looked up quickly; then he continued, in the same measured tone,

“You are right, Joyce — sometimes. It depends upon the measure of gratitude that one meets with.”

Was this intended as a cut? If so, it fell unheeded.

“I wish no one,” Mr. Carmichael went on, “to do a service for me without emolument. I shall, therefore, pay you a certain stipend annually for superintending the future education of my niece. This will enable you to feel more independent than you might otherwise do.”

Joyce felt obliged to him for that, at any rate, and she told him so. Then she waited to hear what further he might have to say, for there was evidently something more to come.

Mr. Carmichael coughed once or twice, gave a prefatory hem, and again resumed his speech.

“I wish to mention one other point. I have lately discovered that my niece is heiress to a large property, now illegally held by others. Illegally, illegally,” he repeated; “in unworthy hands, from which it must be wrested, unless it be given up with a good grace, which it never will be. But,” said he, almost in a whisper, “secrecy as to means and movements is necessary for some time, in order that I may carry out all my arrangements. Therefore, at present, I merely give out that Miss Carmichael is an heiress. I think you now understand the position of affairs. You are said to be a clever girl, Joyce, and you have, I know, received great advantages in your education, greater perhaps than your father was warranted in giving you. But

that is a thing of the past. Let me beg of you to turn them to account now, and so render yourself independent in some degree whilst you are under my roof."

The colour rushed into Joyce Dormer's face as Mr. Carmichael concluded his oration, and an angry answer was rising, but the girl had a strong will. She had made a resolve the night before, and she determined to carry it out. She would stay for a time at any rate; so she mastered her indignation, and remained quietly waiting for any further remarks that Mr. Carmichael might desire to make.

Apparently he had come to an end of his recitations, for he too was silent.

"Is there anything else you wish to say?" asked Joyce, at last.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Carmichael. "I have explained the matter as far as it is necessary to explain it."

"Yes," returned Joyce, though she had a vague sense that there was something unsatisfactory that she could neither define nor fathom.

"And you understand the part you have to take?"

"Perfectly. How old is Miss Carmichael?"

"About eighteen."

"Will she care to continue her education?" asked Joyce.

"Under my roof," replied Mr. Carmichael, authoritatively, "people have no will of their own." Certainly Mrs. Carmichael had none, but whether Mr. Carmichael would find it to be the case with his new inmates remained to be proved.

“Then there is nothing else for me to hear?”

“No, you can go and make yourself useful to your aunt; I do not like idle people.”

Joyce went to Mrs. Carmichael; but Mrs. Carmichael, in spite of her husband's dislike to idle people, had very little to do. No responsibility being allowed to rest upon her, the poor woman was obliged, out of sheer necessity, to spend her days in “strenuous idleness,” but, as her fingers were always moving upon some piece of work or other, Mr. Carmichael conceived that she was fulfilling the destiny of woman.

The work she was engaged upon now was a set of knitted counterpanes and toilet covers for every room in the house; some were of very elaborate patterns, and there was something quite touching in the patient air with which she daily sat down to her self-imposed task.

“It was a great while,” said Mrs. Carmichael to her niece, “before I could think of a long piece of work, but I've found one at last.”

“Let me help you, Aunt Lotty?” said Joyce.

“Help me, my dear,” replied Aunt Lotty; “no, no, that would never do, I should get them finished much too soon; I want them to last me as long as possible, for what shall I do when they are all knitted?”

There was a hopelessness in the tone of the speaker that told how dreary her life must be.

But, Joyce replied cheerfully.

“What do you think of netted curtains to all the windows, Aunt Lotty, and netted curtains to drape the French beds with?”

Aunt Lotty left off knitting, and looked up at Joyce with an expression of intense relief upon her countenance.

“I always knew you were a clever girl, Joyce; who but you would have thought of such a thing, and all in a moment, too? You can't think how much obliged I am to you. It will be work for years. I knew you would be a comfort to me.”

And whether it was the prospect of having something to do for some time to come, or whether it was that Joyce's conversation was more cheering to Mrs. Carmichael than what she was generally accustomed to, may be left as an open question; one thing, however, was very palpable, and that was, that poor Mrs. Carmichael had not spent so pleasant a morning for many a day as the one she was now enjoying with her niece in the bay-window.

And Joyce looked out on the close-shaven lawn and the flower-beds, where the last of the crimson roses were blooming amidst the heliotropes and scarlet geraniums. She was idle according to Mr. Carmichael's definition of the word, and yet she was busy doing a work that he had neglected.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CARMICHAEL'S NIECE.

LATER in the day Miss Carmichael arrived, but Joyce saw little of her until bed-time, for Mr. Carmichael immediately after tea carried her off to his study. "He wished to hear much that she could tell him of his sister." Here Mr. Carmichael's face assumed a more sombre expression than usual, relieved by something supposed to be a faint smile that attempted to play round the corners of his mouth, and was intended to convey to the observer that melancholy and pleasure were mingled in the anticipated revelations; but the smile, signally failing in its efforts to perform an unusual task, served only to elongate Mr. Carmichael's lips, and display a narrow gleam of shining white teeth.

Whatever Mr. Carmichael wished to hear, and whatever he might have to say, took some time, and when he returned from the conference there was a look of satisfaction upon his countenance that was by no means premeditated, but was, as the most casual beholder could at once perceive, the index to what was passing in his mind.

Aunt Lotty glanced at him and became less constrained

than she generally was in his presence, and with a cheerful air she knitted away as though the knitting had to be finished within a limited period,—her senses being pervaded by a misty impression that something good was going to happen to every one.

So the evening wore away, and every one retired to rest, and Joyce sat brushing her hair before the glass.

There came a gentle tap at the door leading into Miss Carmichael's bed-room, and a voice said,—

"May I come in?"

"Yes," replied Joyce.

The door opened, and Miss Carmichael entered.

"Oh," said she, looking round the room, "you have but one easy-chair, and, as I want to have a long talk, I may as well bring in one of mine."

She darted back and reappeared carrying an arm-chair almost as large as herself. It was a wonder to Joyce how so slight a creature could carry so great a burden; but Miss Carmichael was lithe and well-made, and it was apparently little exertion to her.

She was a slender creature, with large brown eyes, and dusky brown hair, and a clear white complexion without a tinge of colour in it. A fairy-like being who seemed to float about, and be here, there, and everywhere at the same moment.

She seated herself in the arm-chair, and gazed steadily and scrutinisingly at Joyce.

“Put down your brush and attend to me,” said she, when she had finished her survey.

“What do you want, Miss Carmichael?”

“Miss Carmichael!” she repeated, with a contemptuous curl of lip, “Miss Carmichael! Nonsense, my name is Doris, call me so if you please. What is yours?”

“Joyce Dormer.”

“Are you my cousin, Joyce Dormer?”

“No, I am Mrs. Carmichael’s niece.”

“Oh, then,” returned Miss Carmichael, “you have an advantage over me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Mean? why, that *your* aunt is infinitely preferable to *my* uncle. Have you not found that out? How long have you been here? Longer than I have, at any rate, and I came to the conclusion in half a second.”

“Mr. Carmichael is said to be an upright and conscientious man,” answered Joyce, quoting from Aunt Lotty’s commendations.

“Said-to-be’s don’t generally amount to much,” responded Miss Carmichael; “besides which, I asked for your own opinion.”

“Suppose I don’t choose to give it?”

“That’s all I want,” said she; “we shall get on capitally; you’re to be my instructress, I hear. If you had been an ally of my uncle, I should not have paid the slightest attention to you; as it is, I see that our views coincide with

regard to him, and therefore I am led to conclude that they may agree in other matters. I've a natural inclination for learning, but there's not been much thrown in my way, and I should be too old to learn from anyone else; but I like your looks, and though you can't be so very much older than myself, I don't mind following your directions."

"I am twenty-one," said Joyce.

"Of age," said Miss Carmichael, musingly; "do you feel very old and very important? I am to come into a fortune when I am twenty-one, so my uncle has been telling me; but where it is to come from is more than I can tell, for my father left nothing, and my mother and I have had hard work to get along."

Joyce looked at Miss Carmichael in surprise; her hands were white and delicate, as though she had never used them for work.

Miss Carmichael's eye followed in the direction of Joyce's glance.

"I can make beautiful lace," she said, "and my mother could make it even better than I could."

She covered her face with her hands and was silent for some moments, rocking backwards and forwards, in her chair. Suddenly she burst forth:

"I don't want this fortune—it's come too late. Why didn't it come sooner? Why didn't my uncle do something for us whilst there was time?"

“But he did not know where you were,” said Joyce; “how should he be able to do anything for you?”

“Did he tell you that?” asked the girl almost fiercely, “did he tell you so? Did he tell you nothing of the letters, that my mother wrote to him seven years ago, when we were all but starving? He took no notice of them at first, but at last he sent a reply, and after that my mother never wrote again. Soon afterwards she was very ill, and I thought she would have died. About a year after that, as she was still far from well, she went away somewhere for change of air, but I did not go with her, for we could not both afford to go, and she did not stay long. I don’t know that it did her much good; at any rate, she never was the same again. She had grown weak through not having food enough, though I did not know it at the time, and she never recovered her strength, but drooped and faded until—” but Doris bent down her head, and her sobs prevented her continuing her speech.

“Joyce Dormer,” she suddenly exclaimed, “would you not think a fortune a mockery if you were in my place? When I think how small a portion would have kept us from the misery we have suffered—when I think that—oh, Joyce! it cannot give me back my mother. And yet I believe that that letter had even more to do with her illness than our privations; there must have been something dreadful in it, or it would not have shaken her so. I have it carefully sealed up, and some time I shall open it; some time, she

said I might; and then you shall read it, and we shall learn more of my Uncle Carmichael."

Joyce was silent. Mr. Carmichael had practised deception even at the outset; but she could scarcely understand how so shrewd a man should have so blundered. Had he not foreseen that she and Miss Carmichael were likely to compare notes? True, he might regard his niece as having been too much of a child at the time of his correspondence with his sister to be capable of making any very important revelations; indeed he evidently looked upon her as so much of a child even at the present time, that he would probably not give her credit for understanding much of her mother's affairs seven years ago. Still, Mr. Carmichael had deceived her. Joyce felt it, and Miss Carmichael appeared to have strong misgivings of his integrity, from her next remark.

"We must stand by one another, Joyce; we shall perhaps need a friend in this house."

"My Aunt Lotty," suggested Joyce.

Miss Carmichael shook her head.

"Aunt Lotty is too much afraid of Uncle Carmichael."

"How do you know that?" inquired Joyce, in some surprise.

"Can I not see with my own eyes? *Poor* people watch a good deal, Joyce; their eyes get sharpened," said she, half smiling and half sighing. "Poverty improves some part of the mental machinery, but I am not learned enough to tell you which portion. But we will not go into that, or I shall

keep you sitting up all night. I see you are just on the eve of a disquisition that I am not quite up to yet, though I have thought more on such subjects than you would imagine. Good-night," and she rose, lifting the chair with the same ease that had so much surprised Joyce before.

"I shall see you again," answered Joyce, "for I sleep in the little bed in your room. Have you any objection?"

"None in the least. I suppose they thought I should be frightened in such a large room. Is it haunted?" she added, jestingly.

"I thought—I heard—"

"Well—what did you hear?"

"That you were a little timid," said Joyce, hesitatingly.

Miss Carmichael clapped her hands.

"Joyce," said she when she could speak without laughing, "you must not believe all you hear; just take me for what you find me. I am not more afraid than you are."

"But I am a little afraid sometimes," replied her companion.

"I never am, so I can take care of you; I am as bold as a lion, and have need to be, for I have come into the lion's den. My uncle has no fear either; there is that much of a Carmichael about him, but not much else. See," said she, leaving the chair, and unfastening a locket that hung by a riband of black velvet around her throat, "here is a likeness of my mother; it was taken many years since by an artist who lived in the village where we were living; not the one

that I came from, but one where we were happier. We removed to the village where my mother died, on—on account of work,” finished up Miss Carmichael, with a great sob.

Joyce took the locket, and, opening it, discovered the miniature of a fair woman, with the sweetest expression she had ever seen.

Certainly it bore no resemblance to Mr. Carmichael: the eyes were blue, the hair very light; neither could Joyce trace any likeness in it to Miss Carmichael.

“I am not like my mother,” observed Miss Carmichael, noting Joyce’s look.

“No.”

“We had no likeness of my father, and I was but a baby when he died, so I don’t know if I am like him either,” said Miss Carmichael; “my mother never spoke of him, and so I never heard what he was like.”

She took the locket, which Joyce was still examining.

“It is a curious locket,” said Joyce.

“Yes, it was one of my mother’s few remaining treasures, and Gabriel painted the portrait to put into it.”

“Gabriel! Who was Gabriel?”

“The artist I was speaking of; his mother was a friend of my mother’s; she was very kind to us, but she is dead now.” Again she turned towards her own room. “We are firm allies, Joyce,” said she looking back.

“Yes, Miss Carmichael.”

"Doris," said she, somewhat impatiently; "you cannot think how much out of place Miss Carmichael sounds."

"Doris, then."

"Thank you," rejoined Doris, gravely; "good night," and she closed the door.

And then Joyce opened her diary and wrote until a late hour.

When she retired to her little bed, Miss Carmichael was asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOUR?

THE nearest house to Green Oake was Lynncourt, the residence of Mr. John Gresford Lynn; indeed it was the only house of any importance that was near at all, consequently the Gresford Lynns might be said to be the Carmichaels' only neighbours.

But that there was no neighbourly feeling between them, or at least between the heads of the houses, was soon apparent to Joyce.

She had met Mr. Gresford Lynn a day or two after her arrival, and inquired of Mr. Carmichael as to where he lived and who he was, observing that he was a handsome man. But Mr. Carmichael looked sterner and graver than ever, and bade her not mention the name to him, as Mr. Gresford Lynn was no friend of his.

So Joyce was silenced, but unsatisfied. The next Sunday, as they were all going to church, they met Mr. Gresford Lynn face to face. He did not look at Mr. Carmichael, neither did Mr. Carmichael look at him; but they saw each other for all that, and Mr. Carmichael's thin lips seemed thinner than ever, so tightly did he close them.

Mr. Lynn had turned round to help his wife, who had just driven up to the church-gate in a low pony carriage. Her veil was partly raised, so Joyce caught a glimpse of a pale, thin face, that must once have been very beautiful, but she looked ill and worn now, and her thick black hair made her face look even whiter than it was. She was evidently in the last stage of decline.

Mr. Gresford Lynn was a tall man with a delicate complexion, that gave him the appearance of being many years younger than he really was; and he looked down at his wife as she leaned upon his arm so tenderly, that Joyce wondered how a face that could assume an expression so almost angelic, could have looked so scornful as it did but a few moments since, and as it looked again when he passed the Carmichael party in the porch, where they had paused a moment for Aunt Lotty to fasten her shawl.

And Mr. Carmichael's lips were again compressed, and a scowl passed over his brow.

Thus the two men went up into the house of God to pray. Mr. Carmichael repeated the responses audibly, so Joyce could hear him say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." And she wondered what answer would come to Mr. Carmichael's prayer.

Yet how many people do the same! How many attend church regularly, repeat the prayers and take part in the responses, and come out as hard and unforgiving towards their enemies as when they went in! They are satisfied

with the mechanism of religion, without considering the wheels and springs. And so the machinery gets out of order, and does not work, and is pronounced a bad invention, and man takes out a new patent for himself, for he is a bad workman, and complains of the old tools. Or it may be that his mind is retrogressive, and he considers the ancient doctrine of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," superior to the Christian dispensation.

When Joyce and Doris one day discussed the matter, Doris attributed it to the fact that the greater part of mankind were humbugs.

It was a sweeping and, perhaps, not uncharitable solution of the difficulty. There is not a vast amount of honesty in the world, and people do not seem to be aware of their short-comings in that point of morality. Poor Pope has been cavilled at for the sentiment, that "an honest man's the noblest work of God," but Pope was not so much at fault. It requires a stronger man, a man of more invincible will and inflexible principle to be an honest man in this world, than those who condemn Pope have any idea of. Of course Pope was not thinking much of the "picking and stealing" part of the business; that is a very trifling item.

But to return. The service went on, so did the responses, and the congregation called themselves "miserable sinners" as often as it was written down in the Prayer-book. Doubtless they spoke the truth with their lips, but in their hearts

they probably regarded the epithet as being simply a technical term, a part of the religious machinery they were grinding at.

There were two little boys in Mr. Gresford Lynn's pew, lovely as cherubs: the elder might be eight, the younger not more than four years of age. They were his only surviving children; the rest had died in infancy.

At one period Joyce noted that Mr. Carmichael's eye was riveted on the elder of these two children, and that a gleam of malignant triumph beamed on his countenance. Wherefore?

If Mr. Carmichael hated the father,—as for some reason unknown he assuredly did,—why need he extend the feeling towards the innocent children?

Yet the baleful smile still played on Mr. Carmichael's lips, and he softly rubbed the tips of his lavender gloves together as his look strayed every now and then towards the Gresford Lynns' pew.

Mrs. Carmichael's gaze was also directed towards the children, but her glance was one of such undisguised admiration, that it attracted the attention of the mother, and brought a pleased look into her sad face.

The service passed. And moving down the aisle, the Carmichael party brushed against the Gresford Lynns. Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael did not look at each other, but each saw the other as before, and a dark shadow passed over the faces of the two men.

“Aunt Lotty,” said Joyce, as she and Doris were sitting with her in the afternoon, “why does Mr. Carmichael hate Mr. Gresford Lynn?”

“Hate him?” repeated Aunt Lotty. “Mr. Carmichael does not hate Mr. Lynn; he is too good and upright a man to be capable of hating anyone.”

No sequence, thought Joyce, though she did not say so, but, modifying her form of expression, asked,

“Then, why does he not like him?”

Aunt Lotty was perturbed.

“My dear,” she answered, “we will not speak of Mr. Gresford Lynn. Mr. Carmichael has good reasons for objecting to him, or he would not do so. I think he must be a bad man in some way, and therefore Mr. Carmichael does not allow him to be spoken of.”

“A bad man,” echoed Doris, impetuously. “I don’t believe it. I beg your pardon, Aunt Lotty, but with such angel children as those, I don’t believe any one could be bad; and how careful he was of his wife.”

“They are beautiful children,” said Aunt Lotty; and she sighed.

“And they looked up at their father so confidingly, and how lovingly he stroked the little one’s curls,” added Doris. “Aunt Lotty, there is some mistake. I’ll clear it all up in a fortnight, and then we shall have some neighbours.”

Aunt Lotty looked up in alarm.

“Oh, no, Doris. It would displease Mr Carmichael exceed-

ingly. He is not accustomed to have his decisions interfered with."

"But there must be some mistake," persisted Doris; "I do not believe that Mr. Lynn is a bad man."

Doris had not noticed the scornful look as Joyce had done; and yet, even having seen it, Joyce found herself agreeing in Miss Carmichael's verdict. Then she asked, half-involuntarily,

"Did Mr. Carmichael ever know Mr. Gresford Lynn, Aunt Lotty?"

But the moment after she regretted the question, for Mrs. Carmichael appeared so unaffectedly distressed.

"Dear Joyce, don't ask any questions. I never know anything, and Mr. Carmichael would not approve of this conversation. He would not be pleased at my having allowed you to mention Mr. Lynn's name."

Doris's eyes flashed; but Mrs. Carmichael was not looking at her. Joyce made some trivial remark concerning something in which she had no interest, and so the conversation turned into another channel.

And, after awhile, Aunt Lotty grew drowsy and fell asleep, and the two girls took up their books, but they did not read much; the pages they pored over were less interesting to them than their speculations as to the probable past of Mr. Gresford Lynn.

The past that came within the reach of Doris's researches during the next week did not throw any light upon the

animosity that subsisted between the proprietors of Green Oake and Lynncourt.

Mr. Lynn had come to Lynncourt exactly seven years since. It was a wilderness of a place then, and had been left to him, together with a large fortune, by an uncle, on condition that he would improve and beautify it until his eldest child, whether boy or girl, should have reached the age of twenty-one. It was then, with the greater part of the fortune in money, to pass into the hands of this child.

At the time of his uncle's death, Mr. Lynn, or, rather, Mr. Gresford—for he assumed the name of Lynn in connection with the property—was living in the Brazils, where he had amassed a considerable property, and where he had married a Spanish lady. Their first-born child, a son, was then nearly a year old, and John Gresford, beginning to weary of a life abroad, had more than once turned his thoughts towards his native land.

His wife had no relatives; indeed, her being a penniless orphan, with no one to care for her, had in the first instance been his inducement for marrying her. For John Gresford led a solitary life and entered into no society, and was believed to have had some early disappointment that prevented his thinking of matrimony. However, he married, and surprised the people, and partially silenced their theories. He also partially emerged from his quiet life; but, Mrs. Gresford being delicate, they seemed to their gayer neighbours to lead a life that savoured more of the anchorite

than of the social member of society. Mr. Gresford's homeward-bound thoughts were brought to a decision by his uncle's will, and he determined to return to England as soon as he could wind up his affairs.

And his affairs being wound up, he set sail for England, arrived at Lynncourt, took possession of the property, and assumed the name of Lynn, in addition to his own. Immediately after their arrival, twin-daughters were born who lived but a few months, and a small stone cross in the churchyard recorded the early deaths of Ellen and Teresa, the beloved daughters of John and Teresa Gresford Lynn.

There had been several children born since then, but of these only one had survived, the younger of the two boys that Joyce had seen at church.

Joyce and Doris were no nearer the original difficulty. Wherefore were Mr. Carmichael and Mr. Lynn at enmity? Was it as John Gresford that Mr. Carmichael had known him? But yet Mr. Carmichael had never been in South America. And he had never left England since his marriage, which was now well nigh eighteen years ago. Before that time he had been living in Australia. And his relations now were certainly with Australia, and with no other part of the globe; and to the arrival of the Australian mail he looked forward with constant anxiety.

The hatred of the two men, then, dated back prior to those eighteen years of married life. That there had been no cause for it since Mr. Lynn's arrival at Lynncourt was

easily gleaned from Mrs. Carmichael's utter want of knowledge upon the subject.

Eighteen years at least of intense hatred! Joyce speculated upon it. It is strange how long hate lasts. Is it, then, stronger than love? Truly many a kindness is forgotten, whilst one act that causes anger burns into the heart, and leaves there a scar for ever. In how many hearts are there great raw wounds still open, rankling as if a poisoned dart were piercing them, which no hand has been raised to withdraw, and into whose sores no healing balm has been poured, but which rather have been kept open by a series of constant irritants.

For seven years these men had sat a-nigh each other in the house of God. For seven years had they been aware of each other's presence, yet had ignored it through some long pent-up hate that smouldered in their breasts. For seven years they had prospered close by each other, and had enjoyed the blessings of life. True, the death-angel had entered the house of the one, and borne away treasures thence, and the other had seen the little coffins carried from his neighbour's door. Yet had not sorrow in the one case, nor compassion in the other, softened the two men's hearts. When the sun rose a cloud rose also to darken it, and when the sun went down a cloud still lingered in the firmament, that storm and sunshine alike had failed to chase away.

What were the thoughts deep-buried in the hearts of these two men!

CHAPTER V.

SOME PAGES FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.

August 20th—What would Mr. Carmichael say if he knew of our day's adventure?

Fortunately, Mr. Carmichael has been too much engrossed to think of us. He gave out at breakfast that he had business of importance to transact, which would more than occupy him the whole of a long morning.

"Suppose we dine later, then?" suggested Aunt Lotty, timidly. And for once Mr. Carmichael made no objection to her suggestion. Indeed, he gave it a meed of praise.

"It is well thought of," said he. Here poor Aunt Lotty's face quite lighted up—"and the girls will perhaps like to pic-nic in the cornfields. My last field is being carried. You can see to it, Charlotte. Then they need not hurry home to luncheon in the heat of the day."

Really Mr. Carmichael is becoming quite amiable. It is very seldom that he so far unbends from his ordinary coldness and stiffness of manner.

Doris and I set forth. But not to the cornfields. There was a boat on the river, and we had taken to rowing since

our arrival at Green Oake. So we paddled lazily down the stream, intending to moor in a favourite nook about a mile away.

It would have been a forbidden spot had Mr. Carmichael known of our partiality for it, since it lay close on the borders of Lynncourt, in a part where Mr. Lynn owned the fishing.

But Mr. Carmichael did not know of it, and we felt no inclination to obey him in "the spirit." Other obedience than "the letter" we held to be supererogatory, and determined to take our pleasure until a decided check should be put to it.

It was a spot little frequented by the Gresford Lynns, so there was not much danger of meeting them.

Not that we should have had the least objection to doing so, for the beautiful children who were so soon to lose their pale dark-eyed mother had some irresistible attraction for Doris, and I must confess that I had a secret desire to see Mr. Gresford Lynn, and to judge for myself what manner of man he was.

It was a sultry day, and we were glad to get under the shady trees. We could not have chosen a more sheltered spot; the branches drooped, and in some places dipped into the water, and through narrow openings we caught a glimpse of the landscape beyond, with the river winding far away towards the distant hills. And how green the water looked with the shade of the leaves cast upon it! "Like to

the waters of an emerald sea," so Doris said, as she looked down into the clear depths.

"Beneath a vaulted roof of emerald spread," added I, falling into her humour, and looking up at the layers of leaves through which the sun could not find its way.

"Just the place to be poetic in," mused Doris, moving aside a bough to get a peep at the view. And as she did so a party came in sight, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Lynn, and the two children. Mr. Lynn was pushing his wife's garden chair himself.

Mrs. Lynn looked whiter than ever, and very languid. Her husband wheeled the chair close to the water's edge and seated himself on a mossy stump near. I could not see his face, for his back was towards me. But I could see his wife's. She was speaking very slowly, and in a low faint tone.

We could not hear what she said, and yet I felt as though we were eavesdroppers. I looked at Doris; the thought had also occurred to her.

"Let us go a little farther down the stream," said she.

As we plashed gently past the spot where Mr. and Mrs. Gresford Lynn were sitting, the two boys, who had been collecting some few ears of corn that had been left after the gleaning, attracted by the boat, ran quickly towards the river to see us pass. The ground sloped considerably, and the elder of the two, who was in advance of his brother, not being able to stop himself, or not seeing the abrupt

termination of the slope, made one step too many and in a moment plunged headlong into the water.

A cry of horror burst from Doris. The cry and the plunge caused Mr. Lynn to turn his head, and at the same moment Mrs. Lynn became aware of what had happened.

How it came to pass, I know not, but before I had time to think, like a flash, I saw the child rise to the surface and lie in the boat in Doris's arms; she sobbing like a child over him.

I did not seem to see it, I only knew that it was done; that a lithe figure had leaned over and caught a wet form, lifting it into the boat with a strength that appeared almost superhuman.

It was like a dream, from which the pleasant voice of Mr. Lynn awoke me, as he spoke cheerfully to the frightened boy.

"Only a ducking, little man; we must run home for some dry clothes."

But I could detect a quiver in the firm-set lips, and I knew that he did not lightly estimate the danger his child had been in.

We had pulled close to the spot where Mrs. Lynn was sitting. She was much agitated, and I could see Mr. Lynn was in some perplexity as to how he should act. Emboldened by our eventful introduction, I asked,—

"Can I be of any use? Let me take the child home."

But the boy clung to his father and would not leave him.

"I shall not be long away," said Mr. Lynn, turning anxiously to his wife.

"No," she said, answering his thoughts, "I do not mind being left; go with him, dear."

And we stayed with Mrs. Lynn until his return. I don't know how it is that Doris creeps into people's hearts as she does, but she was sitting at Mrs. Lynn's feet as if she had known her all her life, and Mrs. Lynn's slender fingers were stroking back her ruffled hair.

No one spoke much, we were all thinking of what *might* have happened, but when Mr. Lynn came back and we rose to go away, Mrs. Lynn with her sweet foreign accent said,—

"I hope we shall meet again."

A shade passed over Mr. Lynn's face as I looked up at him, scarcely knowing what to answer.

"I think you understand how matters are," said he, after a moment's hesitation.

"Yes and no," I replied.

"The yes is sufficient," he said, with a sigh. "I have no power to do anything but to ask Mr. Carmichael's nieces not to think me ungrateful." And again his lip quivered, though his voice was calm and steady.

And I absolved this man from all wrong in the quarrel, whatever it might have been, between him and Mr. Carmichael.

I wonder if we shall ever know more of these people, ever

meet them again, and ever learn the secret sore that festers still, and makes the neighbours enemies?

Doris and I can talk of nothing else, and probably we talk a great deal more than we should otherwise do, because it is a forbidden subject. The spirit of Bluebeard's wives has animated us; but I hope it will not be to so tragical an ending.

And Doris says,

“If Aunt Lotty had been Bluebeard's last wife, the story never would have been written.”

Poor Aunt Lotty! I should so like to tell her of our meeting with the Lynns. But still it is better not. She can keep nothing from Mr. Carmichael. I am quite sure he confesses her every night. She is so anxious not to hear anything we have to say that might be displeasing to him.

By the way, what could Mr. Carmichael have been doing in Doris's room?

Doris had stopped for a minute in the garden to gather some heliotrope. I was, therefore, in advance of her, and had reached the top of the stairs before she entered the house. As I did so, Mr. Carmichael came hastily along the passage. He gave a little start as he saw me, and muttered something about the flapping of a window in Doris's room that had disturbed him.

But that could scarcely have been, for there was not a breath of wind stirring, and the casement, though not

fastened back, hung as steadily against the wall as if an iron clasp had held it there.

Besides, there was a consciousness in his manner that convinced me he was not speaking the truth. I said nothing to Doris, nor do I intend to say anything to her at present; but I shall watch, and see what takes place.

I could not help asking,

“Where do you keep your mother’s letter, Doris?”

“Locked up in my cedar box,” she answered. “There are other letters in the same packet. My mother sealed them all up together, and desired me not to open them as long as I had a home at Green Oake, and was happy there.”

“And you are happy,” I said, half questioning her.

“Oh, yes, as long as you and Aunt Lotty are here. Uncle Carmichael would of course be a dead weight, unless there were counter-charms. He seems to bring winter with him on the hottest day. But when this fortune comes, if ever it does come, if I don’t like being here I can go away; and you must go with me, Joyce, for I could not part with you.”

She had grown wonderfully fond of me in the short time we had been together. Her clinging, impulsive nature could not do without a prop to twine itself around. And yet she was strong enough in will and daring—stronger sometimes than I. A curious mixture of strength and weakness, that gave a certain fascination to her character. “She cannot part with me!” All very well, thought I, at present; but in the future other interests may step in. However, I did

not pursue my musings on this subject, for another matter was weighing on my mind. An idea had taken possession of me, an idea of which I could not divest myself.

“I should very much like to see your mother’s handwriting, Doris,” said I, reverting to my idea. “Would it pain you to show it to me?”

“No,” returned Doris, kneeling down by a small trunk, and taking therefrom the cedar box. She unlocked it, and gave me the packet to look at. There were only a few words of superscription in a clear, though somewhat trembling hand—“To be opened by my [dear Doris when she needs assistance.”

I looked at the envelope. It was sealed with red wax, and her mother’s Christian name was upon the seal.

I examined it attentively.

“It is sealed with this seal that I always wear now,” said Doris lifting up a bunch of trinkets attached to a little chain that Mr. Carmichael had presented her with. But suddenly she cried out—

“My seal is gone, my mother’s seal! Oh! where can I have lost it?”

She darted out of the room and flew downstairs. Mr. and Mrs. Carmichel were still in the drawing-room.

“Oh, Aunt Lotty! Aunt Lotty! I have lost my seal; perhaps it has dropped somewhere on the floor.”

I had followed close upon her steps, and I saw Mr. Car-

michael start as he had done in the passage; but he quickly recovered himself, and joined with much alacrity in the search.

"You may have lost it in the fields," he said, when he had fruitlessly hunted in every imaginable place; where were you?"

"We did not go into the cornfields," replied I, though the question was not addressed to me; "we went down the river in the boat."

"Ah!" returned Mr. Carmichael; "then that is where you have probably lost it. Either in getting in or getting out it may have caught on something, and the ring have snapped, and so it has dropped."

"Into the water?" interrupted Doris.

"Very likely," said Mr. Carmichael, quietly.

"Was it old, and was the ring much worn?" inquired Aunt Lotty.

"Yes," answered Doris, half-crying.

"I am afraid, dear, that you will not find it, but it shall be searched for," said Aunt Lotty, soothingly.

"I am afraid it is hopeless," said Mr. Carmichael.

And we went up to our rooms again, and once more I looked at the packet, and noticed a slight difference of colour at the edges of the seal, as though it had been sealed with two different kinds of wax.

It had been my intention to offer to take care of this packet for Doris, as I had had a presentiment that it might

somehow fall into Mr. Carmichael's hands, though why I should have this feeling I cannot imagine nor why I should have had any misgivings with regard to it. However, I felt convinced that it was safe enough now, as containing nothing else that Mr. Carmichael wanted. How far it had been tampered with no one but himself would ever know.

Shall I mention my suspicions to Doris? I cannot make up my mind. Perhaps it is better to be silent until I have something tangible to lay before her.

There is a cat-like stealthiness in Mr. Carmichael's manner that makes me distrust him. How could Aunt Lotty pin her faith on such a man? But he is so plausible, and Aunt Lotty is so unsuspicious. I have no doubt she thinks herself unequally yoked with an angel! Alas! alas! how credulous some women are. Thank goodness, I am not.

* * * * *

Aug. 21. Another confirmatory proof that I am not altogether on a wrong track.

Doris and I came down late to breakfast, despite our intention of being up betimes to hunt again for the missing seal. But, being tired with the fatigue and excitement of the day, we slept on longer than usual.

"Not that there is the faintest shadow of a hope," said Doris, "for I am afraid it must have snapped when I drew the child out of the water."

“It might, in that case, have fallen into the boat.”

A gleam of hope shot across Doris’s countenance.

“Yes; it may yet be found.”

But not in that way.

We had not been long at breakfast before Mr. Carmichael came in.

He went softly behind Doris, and dropped something on her plate.

It was the seal.

“Oh, you dear, good Uncle Carmichael!” screamed Doris, jumping up and dancing round him, “where did you find it? Was it in the boat or on the bank, or on the path, or amongst the grass, or—”

“Stop, stop!” said Mr. Carmichael; “how can I tell you if you won’t let me speak. It was under a tuft of grass by the boat-house. I was very near not seeing it.”

I looked up suddenly at Mr. Carmichael, and our eyes met.

His fell. Yet how did he know that I knew he was telling a falsehood?

“It is snapped in two, you see,” continued Mr. Carmichael, scarcely however allowing Doris to look, for he had taken possession of the seal again, and now held it in his hand. “I shall not let you have it until the ring is made quite safe; it has worn through. I will take it over to Winstowe with me to-day.”

“Thanks, thanks,” said Doris, and Mr. Carmichael, who had already breakfasted, beat a hasty retreat.

"Your uncle has been looking for it this last half-hour or more," observed Aunt Lotty, quietly.

Time wasted, thought I.

"He is so very persevering and patient," pursued simple Aunt Lotty: "he never gives up anything that he sets his mind upon."

I sat still and listened, but I said nothing. I had no wish to be a hypocrite in my own eyes, so I left the conversation to my aunt and to Doris.

I am somewhat curious to discover whither this mysterious occurrence tends, but I shall keep my own counsel, for Doris will open her eyes in time, and her unbiassed judgment will decide more truly than if I had set her upon the track.

CHAPTER VI.

A HERO APPEARS UNEXPECTEDLY.

THERE is an old saying that "People meet once in every seven years." Can this be true? Experience has not done much towards proving it, and yet it shares in the *prestige* of many ancient sayings which people go on believing for old acquaintance sake, kindly turning a blind eye to their weak side.

Practically speaking, one can scarcely support the theory, yet, bring a little spiritualism to bear upon the subject and speculators may believe in its fulfilment. Who understands the mystery of spirit life? Who knows but that in sleep our spirit may wander away and visit those they wish to see, but yet by the seven years' decree are compelled to visit, and so accomplish the theory of our forefathers. Possibly these forefathers had some vague inkling of mesmerism or magnetism: who can say?—an impression they could not define, yet could not shake off, and so they noted down as a fact what was merely a forcible idea in their minds.

There are few among us who do not indulge in some pet superstition, and it is rather pleasant to believe that in our

dreams we hold communion with the spirits of those of whom we dream,—that we and they, impelled by some irresistible attraction, meet, though miles apart, in the mysterious regions of dreamland.

In waking life we have a curious prescience of the proximity of people, which gave rise to another though not over polite apophthegm of our ancestors, and certainly it is strange to observe how a person we have suddenly thought of or spoken of will appear as if in answer to our thoughts and speech, or it may be that his approach has compelled us to acknowledge his proximity.

Even in the matter of letters crossing, it is an odd coincidence that two people separated by space and circumstances should think of each other at the same moment, and that some influence has been at work inspiring each with the desire of communicating with the other. Let who will set down these things to chance, but some may be even found to hold that there are stranger things in heaven and earth "than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

Wild nonsense all this, and folly to write it down, so many may say, and matter-of-fact people will dispose of these fancies in a summary manner; but, with all due deference to these rationalists, I hold that there is a half-way house between superstition and incredulity at which we have not yet arrived in our wanderings, but under whose roof we shall some day sit, and learn a spirit-science which is as yet undeveloped, and is struggling to get free from the weak

absurdities, deceptions, and profanity that have cast their bonds around it.

But wherefore this digression? Did these thoughts occur to the two who so strangely met after years of separation?

For it chanced that Doris met with an old friend whom she had not seen for seven long years.

It was a lovely day in September; the leaves were beginning to turn yellow, and red, and crimson-streaked, and were falling, and there was a light chill in the air as the sun sank lower, that told that the year was growing older and would soon begin to die away.

Joyce and Doris had rowed down to their favourite nook; hoping, as they had done several times since their eventful introduction, to meet with the Gresford Lynns. But Mrs. Lynn's white face was growing whiter and thinner, and she shivered if a breath of cold wind breathed upon her, and those around her knew that she was dying faster than the year, and that she would never see the snow-flakes spread a white pall over the withered flowers.

So it was doubtful whether she would ever come abroad into the fresh, open air again, and whether Joyce and Doris had not seen her for the last time.

Mrs. Lynn had grown very fond of Doris in these stolen meetings; she quite clung to her, and Mr. Lynn appeared to share in his wife's predilections.

However, no Gresford Lynns appeared, and Doris, some-

what disappointed, sat silent for a while; then, suddenly starting up, she proposed going across one of the fields to look at a favourite view. So the field was crossed, and turning down a green lane, the girls came to a stile.

Joyce was going to step over it, when to her astonishment Doris gave a great scream, and bounding past her, sprang over the stile and seized by both hands a gentleman who was quietly taking a sketch of the view they had come to see.

“Gabriel! Gabriel!”

The gentleman looked surprised for a moment, and then his face lighted up as he asked.

“Can it be my little Doris? How you have grown. I did not know you at first.” And he held her hands tightly in his own, and gazed earnestly into her eyes.

“But I knew you, dear old Gabriel, the moment I caught sight of you. Where have you been? I thought I should never see you again.”

And then they began to talk of what had happened since they last parted, and Joyce drew a little aside so as not to appear like an intruder.

She need not have troubled herself, for the two were so engrossed that they were not even aware of her presence. Gabriel had seated himself again, and Doris was half-sitting, half-kneeling at his feet; her hat had fallen off, and he was smoothing back her hair as if she had been a little child.

He did it unconsciously, and she did not seem to notice it, for her face was hidden in her hands, and she was crying.

At something he said to her she looked up, and then for the first time remembered that Joyce was with her. She was upon her feet in an instant.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “I had forgotten. This is Gabriel Chester, Joyce; and, Gabriel, this is my new and very dear friend, Joyce Dormer. You must call her Joyce, and love her as much as I do.”

And Joyce blushed, and felt hot and uncomfortable; and of course could think of nothing to say; but that was not remarkable, for how very few people ever *do* think of what to say at the right time.

But Mr. Chester quietly said,

“I suppose you are accustomed to Doris’s rash suggestions, Miss Dormer?”

Miss Dormer! Then Joyce blushed again, and this time felt vexed as well as uncomfortable, though she could not make out why she should feel so. Doris was so precipitate and thoughtless, she was quite startled out of her usual self-possession; added to which, she had been indulging in a reverie on the stile, in which it had occurred to her that it must be pleasant to have so charming a friend as Mr. Chester to call one by one’s Christian name, and be so glad to see one. And then she had looked back on her own experiences and found she had never known any one to com-

pare with Mr. Chester. Oh dear! Was she beginning to be jealous of Doris? She hoped not; she must write down exactly what she felt in her diary, so that she might be upon her guard against the slightest approach of jealousy. Besides, what right had she to feel thus; she had never seen Mr. Chester until to-day, and Doris had known him for years.

Mr. Chester spoke much of Mrs. Carmichael, and said that if there ever was an angel upon earth she was one.

She must then, thought Joyce, have been very different from her brother, for there was little of the angelic about him, and Joyce was sorely tempted to give an opinion that she thought him rather the reverse; still it might be uncharitable, and it was not well to be too unreserved with strangers.

So she made no comments; and at length Mr. Chester changed the subject, and asked Doris if she had been drawing lately; and turning to Joyce he told her that Doris had quite a talent that way if she would only persevere.

“I shall never draw again,” said she. “Oh, those lace patterns, how I worked away at them, and how little I got for my designs!” here the tears began to fall again.

“Poor little Doris,” said Mr. Chester, tenderly; “I did not intend to make you cry. I was not thinking of lace patterns; I did not know about them; I was thinking of your sketches of the cottage and——”

"Gabriel," burst in Doris, "I shall never cease to think of those patterns, and now I am going to be an heiress. Isn't it a shame? I shall hate the sight of the money."

"An heiress, Doris?" repeated Mr. Chester, wondering.

"An heiress," answered she bitterly; "it's something to do with Australia, but I don't know what, and I'm sure I don't care. It's all come too late." And she rocked herself backward and forward, Mr. Chester patting her head as if she had been a baby still.

For he seemed to have forgotten, at least so thought Joyce, the years that were accomplished since he and Doris had met.

"Australia! ah, yes, it might be," responded Mr. Chester, musingly.

And Joyce thought of the Australian mail so eagerly looked forward to, and of the arrival of a giant nugget that was to turn the penniless orphan into a wealthy heiress; and a vague longing after a fairy godmother passed into her mind, for Joyce had not quite escaped from the regions of romance, though reality was beginning every now and then to pull her up with a tightened rein.

But Doris did not leave Mr. Chester long to his musings; she began to talk about her present life, and the pursuits of herself and Joyce; and Mr. Chester was glad to hear that she was making up for lost time, and said he must give her some more drawing lessons.

“If you can,” returned Doris, shaking her head; “but I’ll tell you what you may do, you may go on with the sketch you are taking, and Joyce and I will come and sit with you, and see that you work diligently.”

“Do you draw, Miss Dormer?”

“No,” said Joyce.

Just then, who should come up but Mr. Carmichael; he had been looking over some fields that lay that way.

His countenance lowered when he saw the two girls, and did not brighten when Doris explained that Mr. Gabriel Chester was an old friend of her mother’s. He did not seem particularly glad to see him, though he made a formal speech in which he said he was pleased to meet with any one who had known his sister.

However, he brightened up a little when he heard that Mr. Chester was only going to stay a day or two in the neighbourhood, and actually became so far affable as to ask him to dinner the next day.

Mr. Chester did not appear to appreciate the affability, for he accepted the invitation as a mere matter of course.

Conversation flagged after Mr. Carmichael’s appearance, and after a few disjointed sentences he observed that it was time to think of turning their steps homeward.

“We have left the boat down among the trees, uncle,” said Doris.

“Which trees?” he asked, rather sharply.

Doris pointed across the meadow.

"Too near the Lynncourt estate," he said. "I desire you never to go there again, girls."

And then Mr. Carmichael went his way, saying he could not go with them to the boat as it was too near the Lynncourt property.

His departure was a relief to all; and Mr. Chester, collecting his sketching apparatus, accompanied Joyce and Doris to the boat. Joyce was just going to say "good-bye," when he stepped into the boat and taking the oars said he would row them home.

So he rowed, and Doris steered, whilst Joyce gazed dreamily over the side into the water, wondering what might next happen in the story she had begun to weave, and listening to Mr. Chester's deep voice as he chatted with Doris.

There was a little hesitation when they landed, for neither Joyce nor Doris would have felt at liberty to ask Mr. Chester into Mr. Carmichael's house.

Doris, however, solved the difficulty.

As the boat was being fastened up, she turned to Mr. Chester.

"If Green Oake were my house, Gabriel, I should ask you to come in and spend the evening with us, but as it is not, all I can do is to show you the gate that leads out of the garden into the village, and direct you to the inn. There—there's nothing like the truth, Gabriel, though it's sometimes hard to speak it."

Mr. Chester looked at her attentively. "Quite right, Doris," he began; but what further he was going to say was never spoken, for Mr. Carmichael emerged from a path overgrown with shrubs, and invited Mr. Chester to come into the house.

His manner had completely changed, and he was now as anxious to show attention to Mr. Chester as he had hitherto been averse from doing so. He walked with him to the inn, and would have carried his portfolio had Mr. Chester allowed it. He waited for him and brought him home, and his affability was inexhaustible.

There were two notes in Joyce's diary that night, the one appertaining to Mr. Carmichael, the other to herself. The former ran—

"I have never seen Mr. Carmichael so gracious to any one as he has been to Mr. Chester. He has talked to him incessantly. I cannot help thinking that there must be some reason for this sudden change of tactics.

"Mr. Carmichael's affability has influenced Aunt Lotty. She has been most lively this evening. I suppose it was her husband's unflagging zeal to make himself agreeable to his guest that gave her the courage once or twice to make a remark. Mr. Carmichael would have let the remarks pass by unheeded, but Mr. Chester listened with a deference that won my heart, and caused Aunt Lotty to comment after his departure, 'I have never seen so pleasant a man in all my life.' "

The other passage was as follows —

“To-night I wore a white dress, with blue ribbons, but I am not sure that it looked as well as Doris’s black silk. Doris said the ribbons matched my eyes; but I think my eyes have a greyer shade in them. Mr. Chester seems fond of music, and I don’t think he paid much attention to Mr. Carmichael’s speeches during my last piece.

“Doris and I had a long talk after we retired to our rooms. She thinks—”

But what Doris thought must be left to another chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

JOYCE CONFESSES TO HER STORY.

"DORIS thinks that Mr. Chester is very handsome—" this was the unfinished sentence: then followed Joyce's comments.

"I think," writes Joyce, "that her opinion must proceed from his being an old friend, whom she has always thought much of. He merely strikes me as having a sensible face and pleasant voice. He looks twice as old as Doris; indeed, he has rather an old look, but that may be owing to his being so sunburnt. He seems to regard Doris as quite a child, and forgets that she is over eighteen at the present time. What is going to happen? In spite of his gracious manner I know that Mr. Carmichael will be very glad when Mr. Chester says 'good-bye.'"

So much for the extract.

"Doris," said Joyce, "who is Mr. Gabriel Chester?"

"I don't know," answered Doris.

This was not a very satisfactory beginning, but by degrees Joyce learned the little that Doris did know about him. Mrs. Carmichael had met with him and his mother in the little village where she had taken up her abode.

Mrs. Chester had been an elder girl in her last half year at a school where Mrs. Carmichael had been the youngest day pupil. The great girl had petted the little one and made a plaything of her, and the little one had idolized the superior being who made so much of her. For children have much reverence in their natures, a species of clinging adoration for those above them, that seems to be but little understood, or surely mothers would pay more heed to it than they do. But this adoring principle implanted in the infant mind is too often crushed even in tenderest years. This heaven-begotten idolatry, that makes the parent in the childish heart, type of an unknown God, that so through earthly love the heavenly may be taught, how often is it cast away and trampled under foot by those who understand not the power for good or evil that they hold over the souls committed to their charge.

And when the great girl and the little one met in after years as women, with the disparity of age softened between them, the old bond, though scarcely, recognised, held a gentle sway in the sympathy the elder accorded to the younger, and in the unservile gratitude with which that sympathy was met.

Mrs. Chester was very kind to her old schoolmate, and had assisted her as much as Mrs. Carmichael's gentle pride would allow herself to be helped; and the poor lady, lace-making in her humble lodgings, had been taken into close friendship with her more fortunate companion.

There was another bond of sympathy: they had both lost their husbands, and both soon after marriage.

"Is Mrs. Chester still alive?" asked Joyce.

"No, she died eight or nine years ago, and I have only seen Gabriel once since, and that was soon after my mother received that letter from Uncle Carmichael. I shall read that letter some time, Joyce, and then I shall know what it was that made her suffer so."

But Joyce knew that she would never read that letter.

"Joyce," continued Doris, "sometimes I feel as if I ought not to stay here, as if I could not stay. And yet it was my mother's dying wish for me to come, and so I try to believe that it is right to be here, but often and often my heart leaps up against it. Gabriel asked me if I was happy, and I said 'Yes.' And I am happy, Joyce, as long as you are with me. And I did not want him to think I distrusted Uncle Carmichael; for after all, he is my mother's brother. I told Gabriel what a dear kind Joyce you were, and made him promise to love you for my sake."

"Oh, Doris—" began Joyce.

But Doris stopped her.

"I like all the people," said Doris, "that I love, to love one another, therefore you will have to love Gabriel. I told him I should tell you to do so—"

"Doris!"

But Doris waved her hand imperiously.

"All people I love have to obey me," said she. "I never

wish them to do anything that is not for their own happiness. How nice it would be," she went on, "if you and I and Gabriel could all live together when my fortune comes in."

"And leave Green Oake, and Aunt Lotty? Poor Aunt Lotty!"

"Well, I should like to have Aunt Lotty as well; but you see that would involve Uncle Carmichael," and she paused, as if considering the point. Then she clapped her hands. "What a good thing it would be if Uncle Carmichael were to die."

"Doris!"

"Well, of course, I mean if he were prepared, and all that sort of thing. No one would miss him much. But then," added she, thoughtfully, "I don't think he is prepared. He seems to me the sort of man who never will be prepared. What do you think?"

"Oh, hush, Doris! What right have we to be judging in such a manner?"

"Well, I'm not judging. I'm only speculating, and one can't help speculating. I try to be charitable in all cases, but I often have strong doubts about people. Do you ever have strong doubts, Joyce?"

"Where has Mr. Chester been since you saw him?" inquired Joyce, changing the subject.

"In Italy and Germany."

"Did he know you were here?"

"No; how should he?"

“Had he forgotten all about you?” inquired Joyce.

“Forgotten!” answered Doris, indignantly; “forgotten! Dear old Gabriel would never forget me. He had been down to the little sea-village to look for us, and had found that my mother was dead, and I was gone no one knew whither.”

“Then it was mere chance his coming here?”

“Yes ; if you like to call it so. I don’t.”

“Neither do I. It’s part of the story,” said Joyce, involuntarily.

Doris looked at her.

“Oh, you dreaming Joyce! I believe you live in a world of romance. Do tell me the tale that is going on in your brain.”

“Not now, but some day you shall peep into my diary, and see what is written there.”

It was a rash promise, and the moment after Joyce doubted whether she would ever care to fulfil it. Would she like anyone to see *all* that was written down there?

Of course Doris wished to take advantage of it at once, but Joyce said,

“Not now ; but when we are old women, and this present time seems to us only like a story we read on a fair summer day, half-laughing and half-weeping.”

“With Gabriel for the sunshine,” suggested Doris.

“As you like.”

“As I like! Now is he not a gleam across our paths? See how Aunt Lotty unfolds beneath his rays. And even Uncle

Carmichael has become more amiable for the time being, though I must confess I don't think it's owing to Gabriel exactly. There are wheels within wheels that I can't understand. However, that is not to the purpose; it is Gabriel that has oiled the wheels and made them go more smoothly. Your hard heart will be softened, too, Joyce, when I make him sing for us to-morrow—it is so beautiful. To tell you the truth, I don't think he has been much sunshine to you at present, though why he is not I can't imagine. It always seems to me cheerful where Gabriel is."

"But then you know Mr. Chester so well."

"Yes," returned Doris, pondering. "And you don't. That may be it. You looked quite grave all last evening, and you are looking quite grave now, and tired, too; but that is no wonder, for here we are sitting up talking, and it's near midnight."

She opened the window.

"How dark the sky looks, and yet the stars are shining. I wonder what the stars are really like, if one could get near enough to them. If one had wings! But how tired one would be of flying so far!"

"Perhaps you would like to have electricity applied to wings, and flash along like a telegraphic despatch."

"Horrible!" answered Doris, shrugging her shoulders. "No, I would float along in some marvellous manner that had no fatigue in it, and visit all the distant worlds I see. Sometimes I have a vision that I should meet with fair

cities built of pure gold, where chrysoprase and sardonyx would be as common pebbles—where flowers would never fade and never be out of bloom—where in a fairer Paradise a race of unfallen beings are dwelling, and all is as this earth should be if Eve had never eaten of the fruit.”

“Visionary,” said Joyce.

“Perhaps so; but I’ve watched the stars until they seem like friends to me. I should rather like my horoscope to be taken. Not that I should exactly believe in it,” said she, seeing that Joyce was half inclined to laugh; “but I can’t help feeling that phases of nature have more influence over us than we are aware of—that there is a mysterious relationship throughout the universe that produces an effect upon us, that makes us sometimes feel as if in some way the world and all therein were connected with us, as though we could stretch forth our arms and say, ‘All this is mine.’”

Joyce looked in astonishment at the girl. Her slender figure was stretched to its full height, her dusky hair had fallen down, and her deep dark eyes shone brightly, but not a tinge of warmer colour had stolen into her face, which was white as purest marble.

“You are a strange girl, Doris,” said she, and she gently closed the window.

CHAPTER VIII.

A POINT OF AGREEMENT.

A WONDERFUL change had come over Mr. Carmichael. At breakfast he laid down his paper and made three several remarks to his wife.

It was an event not to be passed over lightly. Aunt Lotty evidently considered it as the beginning of a new era, or perhaps the return to a golden age, after a long interregnum of iron and granite. This is not spoken geologically, but metaphorically. Certainly Aunt Lotty's youth seemed to be "renewed like the eagle's." There was an elasticity in her step and a buoyancy in her tone that told how very small a spark was necessary to kindle a huge bonfire of happiness in her patient heart.

Her knitting was comparatively disregarded, and she went busily about the house, animated by a spirit of amateur dusting.

Yet there had been nothing particularly inspiring in these three remarks of Mr. Carmichael's; they simply had reference to dinner and to the respective merits of roast or boiled. Still Aunt Lotty had been consulted, and it made her seem

of more importance to herself than usual. Her opinion on household matters was held in some estimation, although, as a general thing, she was supposed to have no opinions at all.

In the midst of her little flush of triumph Mr. Chester arrived.

Aunt Lotty had already begun to look upon him as the good angel who had come as the bearer of a new dispensation to her monotonous life, and received him with unaffected pleasure. Joyce and Doris were in the garden, gathering flowers for the drawing-room vases, and Mrs. Carmichael sent him out to them.

He would help them, and then they would the sooner be ready for the sketching expedition that Mr. Chester had proposed the day before. But he had not been thus occupied very long when Mr. Carmichael carried him off.

Joyce watched them conversing earnestly, and once as they passed near her she heard Mr. Carmichael say in a sentimental tone:

“My sister’s darling shall ever find an uncle’s home open to her, and an uncle’s love.”

“She looks as though she had both,” responded Mr. Chester.

And certainly Doris was looking remarkably well; she had improved perceptibly even in the short time she had been at Green Oake.

Then they went on, and Joyce heard no more, but quietly

continued her flower-gathering and flower-arranging, which having at last come to an end, she and Doris equipped themselves for their walk. Mr. Carmichael insisted upon accompanying them. He appeared to be quite fascinated with Doris's friend.

The rest of the party would have preferred his remaining at home.

However, they were not destined to experience much annoyance in the matter, for Mr. Carmichael, much to his discomfiture, was carried off soon after the party had taken up their position, in order to inspect some disaster that had happened at his new dairy.

He groaned inwardly over this *contretemps*, and mentally anathematised the unlucky cows and all those connected with them.

But this did not appear upon the surface. He was led away with a smile upon his countenance, and his apparent amiability unimpaired.

Joyce wandered from one sketcher to the other, looking over their shoulders, and wishing that she, too, had a talent for drawing.

"Do you object to being looked over?" Joyce asked, as Mr. Chester turned hastily round, after she had been for some minutes watching the landscape grow beneath his pencil.

"No," answered Mr. Chester, absently, looking at her as though he did not see her, but some one else standing

there. "You remind me of your aunt, Miss Dormer," said he, at length; "has it never struck Doris?"

Doris was at a little distance, so could not hear what they were saying.

"No, Doris has never mentioned it. Besides, Mrs. Carmichael was not my aunt, Mr. Carmichael is not my uncle."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Chester.

"Did Mrs. Carmichael ever speak of her brother?" asked Joyce, rather earnestly.

Mr. Chester looked at her, half surprised at the tone in which she spoke; still he answered her.

"Not often." He waited; then continued, "I imagine that Mr. Carmichael is much changed in the last few years. Probably softened. His heart seems overflowing with tenderness."

There was a pause, for Joyce was considering in what light to take Mr. Chester's speech. Did he really believe what he was saying? She had no means of judging, for Mr. Chester's eyes had returned to the drawing before him, and were industriously bent on the branches of a very crooked tree.

But Joyce was not long silent. The demon of curiosity had fastened upon her, and inspired her with a strange desire to know something of this Mrs. Carmichael, of whom, until within a few weeks, her brother had never spoken, not even to his wife. "Not even to his wife." Mere sentimental

phraseology, for Aunt Lotty was the last person likely to hear anything of especial importance from her husband. Poor Aunt Lotty! Yet, doubtless, there are a good many Aunt Lottys in the world. And Joyce congratulated herself that she had too much sense ever to become one. Vanity, vanity, Joyce Dormer!

And then she spoke.

“Mrs. Carmichael did not consider her brother to be possessed of much tenderness?” said she, interrogatively.

Quickly enough did Mr. Chester turn away from his drawing, as he bent his eyes full upon Joyce.

“You distrust your uncle, Miss Dormer?”

“My aunt’s husband,” returned Joyce, in correction.

“Your aunt’s husband then,” he repeated, and he waited in expectation of an answer.

But no answer came, for Joyce felt that she involved herself in a dilemma. What right had she to imbue a stranger with suspicions of a man about whom, after all, she might be mistaken? And yet she was convinced that she was not mistaken. The packet was fresh in her memory. A mere suspicion, too. An unproved theory, yet nevertheless a theory that she felt time would show to be a correct one.

“You distrust your aunt’s husband?” repeated Mr. Chester, quietly, still gazing steadily at Joyce, who stood with drooped eyelids, and her fingers nervously twitching her

parasol. There was still no reply, but Joyce raised her eyes for a moment and glanced at his face, hoping that she might therein find an index of the inner man.

And the glance was not without its result, for, hesitating no longer, she replied,

“I do.”

And equally unhesitating was Mr. Chester's rejoinder,

“So do I.”

Joyce stared at Mr. Chester with an expression of such unfeigned astonishment, that he fairly burst out laughing.

“We are physiognomists, Miss Dormer, and have been reading each other's character. Fortunately the result has been satisfactory. You have decided that faith in me will not be misplaced, and I feel that Miss Dormer can help me in fulfilling a trust if she is so inclined.”

Of course it was something that had to do with Doris, Joyce knew that well enough. What an interest he took in her, and what could be more natural than that he should do so. Had he not known her for years? And how pretty Doris was! She had never been so much struck with it as within the last few days. Possibly she had never before observed her so attentively. Just what an artist might admire. Alas! alas! keep out of her heart, little imp of jealousy? don't try to make for yourself a habitation there. Joyce Dormer would scorn herself if she made room for you. How strange that so pleasant a gentleman as Mr. Chester should have called up such an ugly apparition!

“Will you help me, Miss Dormer?”

“Yes.” What else could she say?

“I think,” said Mr. Chester, “that Mrs. Carmichael had some doubt or fear respecting her brother. The last time I saw her, now about seven years ago, she was very ill, so ill that her life was all but despaired of. It appeared to be the result of some shock she had received, but what that shock was no one, of course, knew but herself. I found out from Doris that she had had a letter from her brother, to whom she had written, so I presumed it was in some way connected with his answer. This was the more confirmed by her giving me a small sealed packet, which she requested me not to open unless after her death Doris should need assistance. She hoped it might never be necessary to open the packet, as she wished Doris to remain in ignorance of the facts therein contained; but circumstances might arise in which those facts might be of the utmost importance. She told me that she was preparing a longer document to the same effect, which she should give with similar injunctions to Doris.”

“But Doris was very young then to be intrusted with papers of importance.”

“Not too young, I think, even had the packet been given at that precise time; besides, she had grown old with being her mother’s friend so long, the two were quite dependent on each other. Let me see, Doris will be nineteen next January.”

How accurately he remembered everything connected with her!

“Yes.”

“The snow-child I used to call her, she was so white. She has no more colour now than she had then, and her eyes look even darker. It is a strange style of beauty, and yet very beautiful,” said he, musingly.

“Very,” said Joyce, with a vigorous effort, for she felt the jealous demon trying to muffle her voice.

But Mr. Chester was aware of no struggle and no victory; he looked at her with a pleased smile.

“Ah, I was sure that you would appreciate it.”

Would it have been honest in Joyce to disclaim the implied praise? She almost felt it would have been, and yet supererogatory, added to which, she could not have entered into particulars, so she let the remark pass by, and he returned to the previous subject.

“Nineteen next January. So she would have been almost thirteen at the time of which I am speaking. And now about this packet, Miss Dormer. I lead a rambling life just at the present time: will you take charge of it for me?”

Joyce hesitated: she felt that in one way the packet was safer with him than with herself.

“Have you no one else to whom you can intrust it?”

“No one in whom I can repose the same confidence.”

Foolish Joyce; she felt herself growing quite scarlet with

the little compliment; but Mr. Chester said it gravely, and evidently had no intention of her taking it as such, for he added,

“I am sure for Doris’s sake it would be safer in your hands than in any one’s else.”

“Doris’s sake!” she might have spared herself the blush, what must he have thought of her?

“You forget that I told you I was a physiognomist,” he continued. “I know that you will not refuse without good reason.”

“No,” said Joyce, “I will not, but I must think this over.”

Then up came Doris.

“What have you two been talking about?” she asked. “I don’t think there has been much sketching for the last ten minutes, at any rate. I shall have my wish, I see. I thought you would become friendly if I left you a little while to your own resources.”

Joyce wished that Doris would not say such odd things; yet somehow they fell so naturally from her lips that they scarcely sounded strange. Nevertheless, Joyce did not feel altogether at her ease, but Mr. Chester laughingly said:

“Let me see if you have been any more diligent?” and he took her drawing; but there were scarcely any more strokes than when he had last looked at it.

“I don’t pretend to having been industrious,” said Doris.

"I was watching you. Joyce was shy at first, but you were very eloquent; I quite longed to hear the speech that you were making. But I don't think you were quite satisfied with the answer she gave you."

"Had you been a little more attentive you would have discovered that Miss Dormer gave me no answer at all."

"Then I am just in time to hear it?"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Chester.

Doris looked grave.

"I'm not sure that I intend you to have secrets that I am to have no part in," she said.

And then Mr. Carmichael returned from his dairy inspection, and he took possession of Mr. Chester, so that no further conversation could take place; and as the two girls loitered behind the gentlemen on their homeward way, Doris said, somewhat pensively—

"I don't like dear old Gabriel to have any secrets."

Was she, too, vexed? Was Mr. Chester going to bring discordant feelings into quiet Green Oake?

And so they went home; and in the evening Doris made Mr. Chester sing, and Joyce played the accompaniments, and scarcely knew that she was playing, for it seemed to her as though she heard no sound save Mr. Chester's voice.

And when they went upstairs, Doris said:

"You were softened to-night. You think now that Gabriel

can bring sunshine. You will get to like him as well as I do, Joyce."

And Joyce made no answer; but in her heart she prayed:

"Heaven grant that I may not!"

In the course of the evening she had found an opportunity to whisper to Mr. Chester—

"Keep the packet, and I will send for it when needed."

And Mr. Chester had answered:

"It shall be as you say."

And she knew he was not dissatisfied, but that he had judged her aright, and knew that she had been conscientious in her decision.

CHAPTER IX.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE NOT SELF-SATISFACTION.

MR. CHESTER'S few days lengthened to a fortnight. The August days had passed away, and the crisp September ones were beginning to have an October feeling about them. Why did not Mr. Chester depart? Ah! he could not leave his pupil—he was far too much interested in her progress, for, in spite of all her protestations, he had prevailed upon her once more to take the pencil into her hand.

So mused Joyce, as she watched the two sketching together, and talking together, whilst she stood by and admired first the one drawing and then the other, and sighed to think she was no artist.

Occasionally she tried to excuse herself from forming one of the party, but her objections, if not overruled by Doris, were swept away by Mr. Carmichael; and she found herself constantly in the uncomfortable position of a third, where there ought only to have been two persons.

Half in earnest and half in jest, Doris suggested her making an attempt.

“Who knows what amount of talent you may have until you try,” said she.

And Joyce, half condemning herself for her weakness in allowing herself to be persuaded, was overcome by Doris's arguments. Yet who knows, till the necessity comes to draw it forth, of what amount of latent talent they may be possessed? And yet common sense whispered to her, "It would have manifested itself before."

But people, even if they possess it, do not always avail themselves of common sense. It has a damping effect which the inclination has a propensity to override, and therefore its suggestions fall idly on the mind, or are set aside by the will in a most headstrong manner.

And so with poor Joyce, the temptation to have some kind of right to accompany the sketchers prevailed over her better judgment; she provided herself with pencil and paper, and, under Mr. Chester's auspices, set to work at her first sketch from nature.

But her success was less than dubious. Mr. Chester was obliged to admit that the attempt was a complete failure.

"You must keep to music, Miss Dormer, and Doris and I must be the sketchers."

And an inward pang shot through Joyce's heart, and in her annoyance she could not refrain from saying:

"Then I had better stay at home and practise whilst you are drawing."

Mr. Chester looked up at her:

"Talents are divided, Miss Dormer; it is not fair that one person should be gifted in every way."

Had he discovered her thoughts? She was vexed with herself. But it was just the way in which, if she wished to stand well with anyone, she was sure to be inefficient in the guard she kept over herself. And having spoken petulantly once, she tried to speak calmly and indifferently as she asked:

"Do you think me unreasonable for wishing to be able to sketch?"

But in spite of her assumed indifference there was a certain amount of pique in the tone.

"No," said he, quietly.

"What for, then?"

It was now Mr. Chester's turn to hesitate. And Doris said:

"Gabriel will be delighted to have another pupil to lecture. That is just the way he used to find out what I was thinking of, whether my words fitted my thoughts or not."

"I should not presume to lecture Miss Dormer," said he.

"Though you would much like to do so," put in Doris.

"No," he answered.

"I should not be worth it," replied Joyce, and it must be confessed that she laid rather a strong emphasis on the "I."

What unreasonable creatures women are. No wonder

they are accused of a want of logical power. Here was she angry one moment because Mr. Chester seemed to be finding fault with her, and angry the very next because he did not wish to do so. Do people ever know what they want? And then Joyce felt angry with herself for having betrayed any temper upon the subject, and so, after pretending to be engrossed with watching the progress of Doris's drawing, during which time she felt exceedingly cross and uncomfortable, she made some excuse about something she must do for Aunt Lotty, and left Mr. Chester and Doris talking and laughing, and evidently caring very little whether she went away or not.

Mr. Chester never once looked up from his picture as she made her excuses. Perhaps he knew that they were but excuses; if so, she had fallen still lower in his estimation. So she felt more and more annoyed, and as she could now stay no longer with any dignity, she was obliged to retreat.

As she crossed the garden Mr. Carmichael met her: he had been unable to accompany the sketching party that morning.

"Where is Doris?" he asked.

"Sketching with Mr. Chester."

"Why have you left them together?" said he. "I gave you credit for more sense. Don't you see that this man is an adventurer, and hearing of Doris's expectations, has turned up at the right moment for his own views, but not for mine, for if he thinks ever to marry Doris he'll find

himself mistaken. Are you too blind to see how matters stand? Just answer me honestly."

"Honestly! As if I were likely to do anything else," thought she.

Ah, Joyce!

Then she answered:

"I do see that Mr. Chester likes Doris, but as to his knowing that she was likely to be an heiress, he knew nothing about that until he came here."

"So he says," returned Mr. Carmichael, with a sneer; "but I know human nature a little better than you do, and I've tried to keep them apart. He'll be working on her feelings by talking to her of her mother and of old times, as he is the only person who knows much of their affairs."

And Mr. Carmichael looked curiously at Joyce. He was sounding her: she was perfectly aware of it: but she thought, "the truth never did any harm, so you will have the benefit of any knowledge I may have upon the subject, Mr. Carmichael, and then perhaps your tactics may become clearer to me," so she replied:

"I don't think Mr. Chester knows a great deal about Mrs. Carmichael's affairs; it is a long time since he saw her—seven years ago, and she was very ill at the time, though he did not know what had caused her illness."

"Ha!" said Mr. Carmichael, suddenly becoming much interested, "When? How long since did you say?"

"About seven years ago."

“Seven years ago; and you say she was ill, and he did not know the cause of her illness. Did he not find out the cause? Are you quite sure? You have heard him and Doris talking. Has there been nothing said between them as to the reason of this illness?”

“Nothing,” returned Joyce.

But though she had spoken the actual truth, she almost felt it to be an evasion.

Mr. Carmichael took a few strides forward, then he turned once more to his companion.

“Joyce,” said he, “I don’t like this Mr. Chester. I shall be glad when he goes away. He interferes with the business I have in hand. I feel obliged to be civil to him for my poor sister’s sake, for he and his mother were kind to her at a time,” here Mr. Carmichael stopped, and covered his eyes for a moment with the flabby white hand, “when—when—I was not quite so kind a brother to her as I might have been.” Here Mr. Carmichael was again overcome, and Joyce wondered that he had forgotten all that he had told her relative to his ignorance of his sisters’s existence. But that nothing of the sort occurred to Mr. Carmichael was evident from his continuance of his speech as soon as his emotion permitted him.

“That has all been repented of, Joyce—repented of, and made straight with my sister before her death. And now my views are centered in her child; and to Doris shall ample reparation be made for all the injuries and neglect that her

mother suffered. No matter at what cost, no matter to whomsoever concerned. But this artist, — I don't like him; he must be got rid of. Doris is far too much absorbed in him. He is not good enough for her."

Inwardly his companion pronounced Mr. Chester good enough for anyone, and so she knew did Doris; and if Mr. Chester had any idea of marrying her, which of course he had, all the Mr. Carmichaels in the world would not prevent it.

"Have you any idea when Mr. Chester thinks of going away?" asked Mr. Carmichael.

"Next week."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Carmichael, with a sigh of relief; "and to-day is Saturday. Early in the week do you think?"

"On Tuesday."

"The sooner the better," said he; "and I must find means to prevent his coming here again."

"I believe he is going abroad for the winter," remarked Joyce.

Mr. Carmichael rubbed his hands.

"You are a good sensible girl, Joyce, in spite of your name. I dare say I shall not repent your coming to Green Oake. I would rather that you did not mention this conversation to Doris. I give this caution because it is my opinion that girls tell one another everything when they get together. And Doris might repeat it to Mr. Chester; and though I don't want Mr. Chester for a friend, I don't care to have him for an enemy. You will remember."

Yes she would remember, and say nothing. And then all

her old annoyance, which she had lost sight of during her conversation with Mr. Carmichael, returned with freshened vigour. She seemed to be made a cat's paw of in every way, and to be placed in the most disagreeable position imaginable—in the pay, as it were, of adverse parties, and that involuntarily, through no effort of her own; yet she knew which she sided with, and which, when the time came, would have her support as it had now her sympathies.

She believed all Mr. Carmichael had been telling her to be utterly false, simply because through it she discovered that what he had told her before was not altogether true. It added fresh mystification to the story she was unravelling, and though it bewildered her, it at the same time made her more determined to penetrate it.

She stood silent before him, waiting any further instructions, but he had nothing else to say; "He would go and look after Mr. Chester and Doris."

But, as he spoke, they came in sight.

Joyce was astonished to see them so soon, and blushed when Mr. Chester inquired if she had transacted the business for Aunt Lotty.

To which she made no reply, but made her escape into the house.

By evening she had partially recovered her equanimity. Doris made her play all her best pieces; and, strange to say, Mr. Carmichael, who ordinarily objected to music, seconded the performance of them, and applauded at the end of each,

though he could not have told whether the notes she had played had been false or correct.

As for Doris, she sat in profound admiration; her tiny fingers, though quick as lightning amongst her bobbins, would not have been skilled to run a race with Joyce's on the piano.

And then Mr. Carmichael insisted upon Mr. Chester's singing again to them, and Mr. Chester begged Joyce to try some duets.

Which duets were much more of a success than the sketch from nature.

And Doris listened breathless, and as each song was ended, asked for "but one more."

"How different from me," mused conscience-stricken Joyce; "but I suppose I am less amiable than Doris, and have more need to keep guarded the avenues to my heart."

And, as she closed the piano, Mr. Chester asked, with a half-smile,

"Is not one talent enough, Miss Dormer?"

And Joyce could answer gaily,

"People, you know, are never content."

And when she and Doris were having their nightly chat, she said:

"Doris, I wish I were half as good as you."

And Doris, in some surprise, replied, "You are much better, Joyce."

But Joyce knew her own heart, and how hard it was to

keep it; for, how many little doors there were that were constantly opening to let in the evil thoughts that, when they entered, locked themselves up so securely that it was almost impossible to drive them out again. A citadel that was in a state of constant siege, and wanted all her forces to take and to retake.

And long into the night she sat looking out of her porch window, watching the stars shining through the frosty night-air, and wishing that she, Joyce Dormer, were far away above them all, and had nothing to do with the earth any longer.

"Perhaps," she pondered, "I am becoming more spiritual, and rising above a temporal frame of mind."

"No, no," said an answering voice within her; "it is still self, self. There is a gnawing pain at your heart that you must bear for many a day, Joyce Dormer, till in long years, so far off now that they scarcely seem to have a beginning, it will have worn itself out, and there will be peace once more."

"Peace, peace," sighed Joyce; "oh, that I were far away from Green Oake, and had never seen either Doris or Mr. Chester."

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTH SINGES ITS WINGS.

MR. Chester went at last.

Mr. Carmichael was glad, but he professed to be sorry, and actually drove Mr. Chester to the nearest station himself.

The rest of the party were really sorry at his departure, and Aunt Lotty mourned over it as if he had been a near and dear relative. She felt sure that Mr. Carmichael had quite enjoyed his visit, and that he was all the better for a little society.

"You know, dear," said she, with a half-sigh, "I am but a poor companion for a superior man like Mr. Carmichael, and I fear he sometimes finds it a little dull with me. You see what he can be when he has his equals to deal with."

It was evident that Aunt Lotty, inspired by the halcyon days which had lately breathed around her, had invested in a new frame for Mr. Carmichael, and that he had stepped into it all freshly varnished, or rather a coating of rust and dust that had been covering him for years had been wiped away during the last few days, and Mr. Carmichael now appeared in the guise in which he had shone forth to her

admiring gaze when she was Miss Charlotte Dormer, and he her accepted lover.

Well, if these hallucinations are possible, let them be so. It is well in this world that a small touch of happiness can cast so bright a ray over a very wide space of dreariness and monotony, — that one little spark of hope or joy shall kindle into such a flame that it will blaze like a beacon fire, and lure the traveller on past weary milestones. True, the watch-fire may burn out, but it has done its work; the traveller looks back over the wild weird waste, and knows that without that light he had never had strength to pass through the darksome region.

Aunt Lotty's touch of happiness had been like an enchanted lamp that bathed in golden glory everything that came beneath its rays. Aladdin's lamp was not to be compared with it. What were turbaned slaves and costly garments, and jewelled salvers heaped with precious stones? Mere dazzling trifles, bewildering childish eyes, and making childish hearts wish that the days of magic were not quite beyond the pale of possibility. But older eyes and older hearts are not so dazed with splendid gauds; they have outlived their youthful credulity in the glitter of this world's gold, and want something more satisfying. And lo! there still was to be found upon earth a wondrous lamp whose rays could penetrate to hidden regions and send dancing, life-giving beams into a quiet breast that had long known nothing but darkness.

No wonder Aunt Lotty set a high value on her lamp. It was worth more to her than all the diamonds in Sinbad's valley.

So she treasured up her lamp and kept it bright, and when she rubbed it brighter than usual, a gracious genie appeared; and Aunt Lotty, full of admiration at the apparition, must needs have a sharer in her admiration, and so it fell that she and Joyce had many a long chat over the departed guest.

And Joyce, like a silly fly, drew near to the lamp, and whilst she admired burned her wings at it.

Thus would the conversation run:

"Mr. Chester in the pleasantest—that is to say, almost the pleasantest man I ever met with," began Aunt Lotty; "he reminds me a little of Mr. Carmichael when first I met him—"

"Oh, dear!" mentally ejaculates Joyce, but she answers no word, and Aunt Lotty proceeds,

"Though in quite a different style, for Mr. Carmichael is dark, or perhaps I should say, not exactly dark, but dark and light, whilst Mr. Chester is decidedly fair, only he is so sunburnt."

"Yes," replies Joyce, meekly; and her inward comment runs, "A different style; I should think so!" And then she becomes theoretic, and seeing so great a difference in the two men, is inclined to heterodoxy, and doubts whether both could by any possibility be descended from the same

Adam, and whether there may not be some other source from whence Mr. Carmichael has derived his origin. And she further indulges in a speculation as to what type of strange monster he could have been modified from, or rather in what sort of monster a chain of retrogressive Mr. Carmichaels, carried back to a much more remote period than any authentic pedigree dates from, would end.

But Aunt Lotty does not pause in her eulogies, and so perceives not that Joyce's thoughts are wandering. And then Joyce returns to consciousness with a great start, for Aunt Lotty's next speech recalls her to the realities of life.

"I suppose he will marry Doris. She can't help liking him."

"No."

"And it is a comfort to think how happy she will be with him."

"Yes," answers Joyce; but she feels that her wings are scorched terribly. And thus the conversation ends. And by degrees Joyce comes to look upon Doris's marriage as a settled thing, "which perhaps may be as well, as it prevents my thinking too much of Mr. Chester." So she moralises; but it is doubtful whether her moralising has much efficacy in producing the intended effect.

Sunday and Monday had been very happy days for all parties, for Mr. Carmichael had relaxed in his vigilance. Probably he had been relieved at discovering how very little Mr. Chester knew of his sister's private affairs. But

"I was watching you. Joyce was shy at first, but you were very eloquent; I quite longed to hear the speech that you were making. But I don't think you were quite satisfied with the answer she gave you."

"Had you been a little more attentive you would have discovered that Miss Dormer gave me no answer at all."

"Then I am just in time to hear it?"

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Doris looked grave.

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CHAPTER IX.

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"Though you would much like to do so," put in Doris.

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"Where is Doris?" he asked.

"Sketching with Mr. Chester."

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himself mistaken. Are you too blind to see how matters stand? Just answer me honestly."

"Honestly! As if I were likely to do anything else," thought she.

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Then she answered:

"I do see that Mr. Chester likes Doris, but as to his knowing that she was likely to be an heiress, he knew nothing about that until he came here."

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"Ha!" said Mr. Carmichael, suddenly becoming much interested, "When? How long since did you say?"

"About seven years ago."

“Seven years ago; and you say she was ill, and he did not know the cause of her illness. Did he not find out the cause? Are you quite sure? You have heard him and Doris talking. Has there been nothing said between them as to the reason of this illness?”

“Nothing,” returned Joyce.

But though she had spoken the actual truth, she almost felt it to be an evasion.

Mr. Carmichael took a few strides forward, then he turned once more to his companion.

“Joyce,” said he, “I don’t like this Mr. Chester. I shall be glad when he goes away. He interferes with the business I have in hand. I feel obliged to be civil to him for my poor sister’s sake, for he and his mother were kind to her at a time,” here Mr. Carmichael stopped, and covered his eyes for a moment with the flabby white hand, “when—when—I was not quite so kind a brother to her as I might have been.” Here Mr. Carmichael was again overcome, and Joyce wondered that he had forgotten all that he had told her relative to his ignorance of his sisters’s existence. But that nothing of the sort occurred to Mr. Carmichael was evident from his continuance of his speech as soon as his emotion permitted him.

“That has all been repented of, Joyce—repented of, and made straight with my sister before her death. And now my views are centered in her child; and to Doris shall ample reparation be made for all the injuries and neglect that her

mother suffered. No matter at what cost, no matter to whomsoever concerned. But this artist, — I don't like him; he must be got rid of. Doris is far too much absorbed in him. He is not good enough for her."

Inwardly his companion pronounced Mr. Chester good enough for anyone, and so she knew did Doris; and if Mr. Chester had any idea of marrying her, which of course he had, all the Mr. Carmichaels in the world would not prevent it.

"Have you any idea when Mr. Chester thinks of going away?" asked Mr. Carmichael.

"Next week."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Carmichael, with a sigh of relief; "and to-day is Saturday. Early in the week do you think?"

"On Tuesday."

"The sooner the better," said he; "and I must find means to prevent his coming here again."

"I believe he is going abroad for the winter," remarked Joyce.

Mr. Carmichael rubbed his hands.

"You are a good sensible girl, Joyce, in spite of your name. I dare say I shall not repent your coming to Green Oake. I would rather that you did not mention this conversation to Doris. I give this caution because it is my opinion that girls tell one another everything when they get together. And Doris might repeat it to Mr. Chester; and though I don't want Mr. Chester for a friend, I don't care to have him for an enemy. You will remember."

Yes she would remember, and say nothing. And then all

her old annoyance, which she had lost sight of during her conversation with Mr. Carmichael, returned with freshened vigour. She seemed to be made a cat's paw of in every way, and to be placed in the most disagreeable position imaginable—in the pay, as it were, of adverse parties, and that involuntarily, through no effort of her own; yet she knew which she sided with, and which, when the time came, would have her support as it had now her sympathies.

She believed all Mr. Carmichael had been telling her to be utterly false, simply because through it she discovered that what he had told her before was not altogether true. It added fresh mystification to the story she was unravelling, and though it bewildered her, it at the same time made her more determined to penetrate it.

She stood silent before him, waiting any further instructions, but he had nothing else to say; "He would go and look after Mr. Chester and Doris."

But, as he spoke, they came in sight.

Joyce was astonished to see them so soon, and blushed when Mr. Chester inquired if she had transacted the business for Aunt Lotty.

To which she made no reply, but made her escape into the house.

By evening she had partially recovered her equanimity. Doris made her play all her best pieces; and, strange to say, Mr. Carmichael, who ordinarily objected to music, seconded the performance of them, and applauded at the end of each,

though he could not have told whether the notes she had played had been false or correct.

As for Doris, she sat in profound admiration; her tiny fingers, though quick as lightning amongst her bobbins, would not have been skilled to run a race with Joyce's on the piano.

And then Mr. Carmichael insisted upon Mr. Chester's singing again to them, and Mr. Chester begged Joyce to try some duets.

Which duets were much more of a success than the sketch from nature.

And Doris listened breathless, and as each song was ended, asked for "but one more."

"How different from me," mused conscience-stricken Joyce; "but I suppose I am less amiable than Doris, and have more need to keep guarded the avenues to my heart."

And, as she closed the piano, Mr. Chester asked, with a half-smile,

"Is not one talent enough, Miss Dormer?"

And Joyce could answer gaily,

"People, you know, are never content."

And when she and Doris were having their nightly chat, she said:

"Doris, I wish I were half as good as you."

And Doris, in some surprise, replied, "You are much better, Joyce."

But Joyce knew her own heart, and how hard it was to

keep it; for, how many little doors there were that were constantly opening to let in the evil thoughts that, when they entered, locked themselves up so securely that it was almost impossible to drive them out again. A citadel that was in a state of constant siege, and wanted all her forces to take and to retake.

And long into the night she sat looking out of her porch window, watching the stars shining through the frosty night-air, and wishing that she, Joyce Dormer, were far away above them all, and had nothing to do with the earth any longer.

"Perhaps," she pondered, "I am becoming more spiritual, and rising above a temporal frame of mind."

"No, no," said an answering voice within her; "it is still self, self. There is a gnawing pain at your heart that you must bear for many a day, Joyce Dormer, till in long years, so far off now that they scarcely seem to have a beginning, it will have worn itself out, and there will be peace once more."

"Peace, peace," sighed Joyce; "oh, that I were far away from Green Oake, and had never seen either Doris or Mr. Chester."

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTH SINGES ITS WINGS.

MR. Chester went at last.

Mr. Carmichael was glad, but he professed to be sorry, and actually drove Mr. Chester to the nearest station himself.

The rest of the party were really sorry at his departure, and Aunt Lotty mourned over it as if he had been a near and dear relative. She felt sure that Mr. Carmichael had quite enjoyed his visit, and that he was all the better for a little society.

"You know, dear," said she, with a half-sigh, "I am but a poor companion for a superior man like Mr. Carmichael, and I fear he sometimes finds it a little dull with me. You see what he can be when he has his equals to deal with."

It was evident that Aunt Lotty, inspired by the halcyon days which had lately breathed around her, had invested in a new frame for Mr. Carmichael, and that he had stepped into it all freshly varnished, or rather a coating of rust and dust that had been covering him for years had been wiped away during the last few days, and Mr. Carmichael now appeared in the guise in which he had shone forth to her

admiring gaze when she was Miss Charlotte Dormer, and he her accepted lover.

Well, if these hallucinations are possible, let them be so. It is well in this world that a small touch of happiness can cast so bright a ray over a very wide space of dreariness and monotony, — that one little spark of hope or joy shall kindle into such a flame that it will blaze like a beacon fire, and lure the traveller on past weary milestones. True, the watch-fire may burn out, but it has done its work; the traveller looks back over the wild weird waste, and knows that without that light he had never had strength to pass through the darksome region.

Aunt Lotty's touch of happiness had been like an enchanted lamp that bathed in golden glory everything that came beneath its rays. Aladdin's lamp was not to be compared with it. What were turbaned slaves and costly garments, and jewelled salvers heaped with precious stones? Mere dazzling trifles, bewildering childish eyes, and making childish hearts wish that the days of magic were not quite beyond the pale of possibility. But older eyes and older hearts are not so dazed with splendid gauds; they have outlived their youthful credulity in the glitter of this world's gold, and want something more satisfying. And lo! there still was to be found upon earth a wondrous lamp whose rays could penetrate to hidden regions and send dancing, life-giving beams into a quiet breast that had long known nothing but darkness.

No wonder Aunt Lotty set a high value on her lamp. It was worth more to her than all the diamonds in Sinbad's valley.

So she treasured up her lamp and kept it bright, and when she rubbed it brighter than usual, a gracious genie appeared; and Aunt Lotty, full of admiration at the apparition, must needs have a sharer in her admiration, and so it fell that she and Joyce had many a long chat over the departed guest.

And Joyce, like a silly fly, drew near to the lamp, and whilst she admired burned her wings at it.

Thus would the conversation run:

"Mr. Chester in the pleasantest—that is to say, almost the pleasantest man I ever met with," began Aunt Lotty; "he reminds me a little of Mr. Carmichael when first I met him—"

"Oh, dear!" mentally ejaculates Joyce, but she answers no word, and Aunt Lotty proceeds,

"Though in quite a different style, for Mr. Carmichael is dark, or perhaps I should say, not exactly dark, but dark and light, whilst Mr. Chester is decidedly fair, only he is so sunburnt."

"Yes," replies Joyce, meekly; and her inward comment runs, "A different style; I should think so!" And then she becomes theoretic, and seeing so great a difference in the two men, is inclined to heterodoxy, and doubts whether both could by any possibility be descended from the same

Adam, and whether there may not be some other source from whence Mr. Carmichael has derived his origin. And she further indulges in a speculation as to what type of strange monster he could have been modified from, or rather in what sort of monster a chain of retrogressive Mr. Carmichaels, carried back to a much more remote period than any authentic pedigree dates from, would end.

But Aunt Lotty does not pause in her eulogies, and so perceives not that Joyce's thoughts are wandering. And then Joyce returns to consciousness with a great start, for Aunt Lotty's next speech recalls her to the realities of life.

"I suppose he will marry Doris. She can't help liking him."

"No."

"And it is a comfort to think how happy she will be with him."

"Yes," answers Joyce; but she feels that her wings are scorched terribly. And thus the conversation ends. And by degrees Joyce comes to look upon Doris's marriage as a settled thing, "which perhaps may be as well, as it prevents my thinking too much of Mr. Chester." So she moralises; but it is doubtful whether her moralising has much efficacy in producing the intended effect.

Sunday and Monday had been very happy days for all parties, for Mr. Carmichael had relaxed in his vigilance. Probably he had been relieved at discovering how very little Mr. Chester knew of his sister's private affairs. But

this ease of mind only made Joyce the more convinced that there was something that Mr. Carmichael wished to have concealed.

Nothing had been seen of the Gresford Lynns during Mr. Chester's visit. The events of the last fortnight had almost blotted out the pale suffering face from Joyce's memory.

Not so Doris. She had found means to inquire, and had heard that Mrs. Gresford Lynn was not likely ever to leave the house again.

"Mr. Lynn carries her up and down stairs, and never leaves her. He is devoted to her, Joyce. He looks almost as ill as she does. I think he must have had some great sorrow in his life. He seems often as if he were thinking not exactly of the present, but as if there were another trouble that in some way mixed itself up with this."

"You seem to have studied Mr. Lynn attentively, Doris."

"Yes," said she. "I studied artistically at first, for though I never intend to do much drawing, or sketching, or anything of that sort, I know that I have artistic perceptions, and I never saw a face I so much admired as Mr. Lynn's."

"Do you think him handsomer than Mr. Chester?"

"Oh, I could not compare the two. Mr. Lynn is so calm, so majestic, so far off. I do not think I should care to talk much to him, for I have such a strange feeling of reverence for him. Now, dear old Gabriel is so sunny and full of life, and I know him so well, and am not the least afraid of talk-

ing nonsense before him. I love him as if he were my own brother."

"And better," thought Joyce, "as every one but yourself can see."

"Those dear little boys!" continued Doris. "How grieved their mother must be to leave them!"

"And yet, perhaps, death takes away grief of that kind," interposed Joyce.

"What do you mean?"

"Everything must seem so different when one is dying," went on Joyce. "One then sees how unimportant everything is; how little it matters whom we leave, for they must soon come after us. There is no dreary feeling of losing, nothing made dark; but we go a little while before, to be ready to welcome those we love. I sometimes envy the dying."

"But life is very beautiful," pleaded Doris.

"To some."

"But for the sake of others one might wish to live. Now Mrs. Lynn, for the sake of her husband and children—"

"Perhaps so."

"Joyce, what is the matter with you to-day? You are not like yourself."

"Nothing. I have been sitting too long over my work, and I want a good walk to freshen up my ideas. Will you go with me?"

"Yes. How I wish we could meet with Mrs. Gresford Lynn once more. But that is impossible."

"Quite impossible. The days are growing colder and colder. There is no possibility of ever seeing her again."

As if people knew anything about possibility or impossibility!

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNLOOKED FOR CONCESSION.

AS if people knew anything of possibilities or impossibilities!

Joyce and Doris were sitting over the fire in the little porch-room.

There came a knock at the door. It was Sarah, the housemaid, and she brought a note for Doris. A note is a great event where there are, so to speak, no neighbours, and Doris received it in some surprise.

But her astonishment was greater when on opening it she found it to be from Mr. Gresford Lynn. Mrs. Gresford Lynn was much worse—almost dying, they feared. She had wished several times to see Doris, and now Mr. Lynn had at her urgent request written to ask if her wish could be gratified. Circumstances prevented his making the appeal to Mr. Carmichael. Would Miss Carmichael and Miss Dormer unite in bringing the matter about. He knew there would be obstacles, he almost feared insuperable ones; but he entreated that they would make every effort to gratify the earnest wish of his dying wife.

Joyce looked at Doris when the note was finished.

“What shall you do?”

“Go,” returned Doris, quietly.

“Go,” repeated Joyce; “and what will Mr. Carmichael say?”

“I do not care.”

“But, Doris,” began Joyce, putting her hand upon her arm, for she had sprung from her seat, and was going for her cloak.

“Don’t stop me,” said she, shaking off the hand impatiently; “the woman is dying, and if there were twenty Mr. Carmichaels they should not prevent my going.”

“Are you going alone?”

At that moment another knock was heard; this time it was Aunt Lotty, as pale as a ghost; she could scarcely speak, her teeth chattered so.

“Girls,” said she, speaking with great difficulty, “what is the matter?—Your uncle says that one of you has had a note from Lynncourt, and he desires to know what it is about?”

“Mrs. Gresford Lynn is dying, Aunt Lotty, and she wishes to see me,” answered Doris.

“How does she know you?” gasped Aunt Lotty, who was now absolutely shaking with fear. “I don’t think I dare tell your uncle, girls; he will be so angry, and you don’t know what it is to make him angry. Oh, how could you, after all that has been said? Joyce, should you mind just

explaining a little to him? I'm so nervous, I should not know what to say."

"I'll go," said Doris, who was now arrayed in her hat and cloak, and springing past her aunt, she hurried down to the drawing-room.

Impelled by an irresistible impulse, Joyce darted after her, whilst Aunt Lotty slowly followed in the wake. But she came no further than the last step of the wide staircase, where she sat down, quivering and shaking, and supporting herself by the banister.

Joyce was in the room almost as soon as Doris.

Doris was holding out the note to Mr. Carmichael. He took it, read it and then, in a cold stern tone demanded,

"And how long have you known Mrs. Gresford Lynn?"

"We have only spoken to her three or four times," replied Doris; "her little boy fell into the water, and we helped him out."

"Very romantic," sneered Mr. Carmichael; "and so you won the everlasting gratitude of the mother? Really, if you had acquainted me with the facts, I would have applied to the Humane Society for a medal for you. I was quite unaware that I had a couple of such very heroic young ladies beneath my roof."

"That is nothing to the purpose now," returned Doris, unflinchingly; "Mrs. Gresford Lynn is dying."

Joyce was surprised at Doris's boldness, though she knew that she had plenty of spirit if she chose to exert it.

"Dying, is she? Dying to-night! Ha, I am sorry to hear that. I hoped she would have lasted a little longer."

Why could Mr. Carmichael wish so? Joyce looked at him in wonder, and Doris repeated, "Mrs. Lynn is dying."

"Well, so you said before."

"And I am going to see her."

"Hum!" said Mr. Carmichael. "Not without my permission, I suppose?"

"With or without," returned Doris, defiantly, as she stood before him.

"You have decided that I shall not give permission?"

"I have."

"Upon what grounds?"

"I supposed you would not."

"Very womanlike—coming to a conclusion without a reason."

"I knew you disliked Mr. Gresford Lynn."

"Is Mr. Lynn Mrs. Lynn?"

"No."

"Your reasoning, then, was unreasonable. At any rate, you might have given me the chance of refusing to let you go, since it appears it would have made no difference one way or the other."

"I forgot," returned Doris; "I might have asked, but I was so afraid of your refusing, that I was slipping away, lest—lest—"

"You were cowardly, then."

"I am no coward, Uncle Carmichael," said Doris proudly, "and I am going to see Mrs. Gresford Lynn."

Mr. Carmichael stepped nearer to her. He took both her hands in one of his, and with the other pushed back her hat, that he might look more keenly into her eyes.

"You have taken a strange fancy to these Gresford Lynns, Doris."

Was he not going to be angry, after all?

"Which child," he continued, "was it that you saved?"

"The elder."

"The elder one—ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Carmichael, and his laughter fell discordantly on the listeners' ears. Joyce half shuddered, it sounded so unnatural, so out of place. "You would do a great deal for these Gresford Lynns, it seems, since you would brave my displeasure in their behalf. Supposing—" But here Mr. Carmichael broke off, as though he were going too far in what he was about to say.

Joyce stood wondering how all this was going to end, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on Mr. Carmichael, to see if by any change of countenance she might be able to obtain a clue to what was passing in his mind. But she was baffled. She could not discover the under-current that was turning the wheel in the Gresford Lynns' favour, for it was plain to see that he intended to let Doris go.

There was a certain power in the man that interested her, despite her disbelief in his truth and honesty. That he had some scheme in hand was certain. That there had been

some anxiety on his mind connected with Mr. Chester that had been relieved was also evident. But further Joyce was unable to penetrate.

By this time Aunt Lotty had crept nearer the door, which was partly ajar. She peeped cautiously through the chink, and, somewhat reassured by the aspect of affairs, she entered.

Mr. Carmichael took no notice of her, but turning to Joyce, he said, "Put on your cloak. I wish you to go with Doris."

Wonder upon wonders! But she obeyed, and in less than two minutes they were on their way through the garden.

It was a moonlight night, and Doris proposed rowing down the river.

But Mr. Carmichael stopped them.

"Such a thing was not to be thought of."

Then how were they to go?

Sarah came running after them.

"Mr. Gresford Lynn had sent his carriage. It was waiting at the turn of the lane."

So Joyce and Doris retraced their steps, and Mr. Carmichael accompanied them to the gate, where he watched until they had reached Mr. Lynn's carriage.

They sprang in, the door was shut, and they were driving in the moonlight to Lynncourt. Not a word was spoken.

They were going to see Mrs. Gresford Lynn once more. And she was dying.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NIGHT THAT COMES TO ALL.

THE moon was shining clear, the stars looked down with gleaming, with joy-bright eyes upon the earth. The frosty air had no chill feeling about it, but an invigorating crispness. It was a splendid night. Nature was in one of her best moods, and seemed to be making the dying days of autumn forestall the glories of the winter-king. There was no sorrow typified in the outer world, no gloom, no weeping clouds, no sighing, moaning wind, but all was calm, and bright, and beautiful.

The fires were blazing brightly at Lynncourt, the lights were burning, the well-appointed servants moved quietly about the house, the two boys, rosy and happy, were sleeping in their little beds; there was no shade of sorrow on their flushed faces, for how did they know what the morrow should bring forth?

Yet to one being in that house, the splendour of the night without, the light and comfort of the house within, only made darker and more desolate the hours that were closing in around him.

A sleeper, white and almost motionless as marble, slept calmly, peacefully; so peacefully that, at times, her husband bent down to hear if she still breathed.

A sound of carriage-wheels drew near, and at the sound the sleeper's eyes unclosed, and she looked up into the face that was watching her, and her lips moved.

Mr. Lynn stooped down to hear the words, "Has she come?"

He left the room to see what success his note might have had.

And met Joyce and Doris in the hall.

Doris was a little in advance, and he thanked her warmly for coming.

Then his eye fell upon Joyce, who was a few steps behind. He started visibly, and looked as if he scarcely knew her; and for the first time it occurred to her that she was an intruder' and had not been included in the invitation.

"Pardon me, Miss Dormer, but my wife's room is darkened, and my eyes were dazzled by the light, so that I did not see you at first."

And he shook her cordially by the hand, still curiously scanning her.

She had taken off her hat in the carriage, and her hair, which had been hastily twisted up, had fallen down, and now hung over one shoulder. Excitement had taken away all colour from her cheek, but had given additional lustre to her eyes.

„My wife has been asking for you,” said Mr. Lynn to Doris.

But Doris could not answer.

“She suffers no pain, for which I am very thankful,” continued Mr. Lynn, in a subdued voice; “but there is no hope. She has no friends here, no relative to tend her with womanly care. Will you stay with her till—till—” he could proceed no further.

But Doris understood, although she could not trust herself to speak, and nervously grasped his hand.

He led the way upstairs, and Doris followed, but Joyce drew back; she felt that she was not wanted, and, seeing an open door that led into the dining-room, she entered, and seated herself by the fire.

She half reproached herself for having come, and yet what else could she have done? It was plain that Mr. Carmichael would not allow Doris to leave the house without her.

The time wore on, and still she sat by the fire. A servant came in to replenish it, and then she was left alone again and not a soul came near her.

Eleven! Twelye! One!

She had been sitting there more than three hours. All was still. Not a sound was heard throughout the house. The silence became oppressive. She seemed so far away and so forgotten. No one cared for her as they did for Doris. It was terribly lonely; the servants had evidently

gone to bed, and there was no one downstairs but herself.

Again she listened; she could hear the quick throb of her heart, but nothing else. Beat, beat, beat, as if it would wear itself out. It was too monotonous; she must hear some other sound.

She rose, opened the door, and listened. There was a timepiece ticking on a side-table, telling the moments, meting out the seconds that the dying woman had to live. When would the night be over?

Besides the clicking of the clock, all was still, and the great hall lamp burned brightly in the silence like a glaring sun shining upon a dead world.

She closed the door again, made up the fire, and drew her chair nearer to it, for the night was growing cold.

Two! Three!

She started up. Had she been asleep? She was conscious of some one being in the room now, and opening her eyes, she saw Mr. Lynn standing by the mantelpiece, contemplating her curiously, as though his thoughts were wandering far away from the present.

"I have awaked you by coming into the room," said he.

"I hope——" began Joyce, and then she paused, not knowing how to inquire after the dying wife.

"My poor wife is sleeping. It was a comfort to her to see your cousin."

"She seemed to take a fancy to Doris the first time she saw her," said Joyce.

"Yes," returned Mr. Lynn, dreamily gazing at Joyce; "everybody must."

"Can I do anything?"

"No, Miss Dormer. Yes," he added, as if a sudden idea had struck him. "I should like you to take your cousin's place for awhile."

"Doris is not my cousin."

"But her name is Carmichael."

"Yes, but I am Mrs. Carmichael's niece."

"Strange," he muttered, "strange."

Joyce looked at him in surprise.

"I beg your pardon; I was dreaming," said he.

Mrs. Lynn's bed-room was but dimly lighted, and Joyce could scarcely for a few moments see anything distinctly.

Then a cloud seemed to roll away, and she distinguished Mrs. Lynn's colourless face on the pillow; one wasted hand was lying listlessly on the coverlid, and the other was clasped in Doris's, who was half lying in an enormous chair at the side of the bed.

Mrs. Lynn was evidently sleeping, and Doris had her eyes half-closed.

Joyce moved softly to her side.

"Let me take your place for a short time, Doris, and go and take a little rest."

"I am not tired," answered Doris.

“You must be,” said Mr. Lynn; “Miss Dormer will watch, and when Mrs. Lynn awakes, you shall be sent for.”

But Mrs. Lynn’s fingers clung so tightly to Doris’s that they feared to wake her by unclasping them, and Doris nestled down again into the corner of her chair.

“Sleep there, then,” said Mr. Lynn, “and Miss Dormer and I will watch.”

And Doris closed her eyes, and, tired with the long night watch, was soon at rest.

Mr. Lynn paced the room softly; he was too much agitated to remain perfectly quiet, though he kept his emotion under tolerable control. Sometimes he paused and gazed from his wife to Joyce, and then back again, as though some link connected them in his mind—and yet the two were quite unlike.

The night wore on, and morning drew near; yet there was no perceptible difference in the light; it was six o’clock, but there was still a thick grey veil over the face of the earth. When the sun rose he would have to struggle through a dense mass of clouds. But at length a faint streak of sunlight stole through a crevice in the window.

Morning had come!

And Mr. Lynn and Joyce still watched, and feared to stir lest they should wake the quiet sleepers.

Joyce sat facing Doris, whilst Mr. Lynn had at last thrown himself upon a couch on the opposite side of the room.

Morning had come!

But not to both the sleepers. For one the sun should never rise again, there would be no more morn and no more night. She had slept her last sleep, a sleep from which there is no awaking upon earth.

Joyce could see more plainly now, for the sun's rays were beginning to exercise an influence even through the closed blinds; a streak of light would pierce here and there, and one fell upon Mrs. Lynn's face.

Why did Joyce start so?

The face was scarce whiter than it always was.

But there was a look upon it that Joyce had seen before.

She softly stepped to Doris.

"Doris, wake up!"

"Hush!" she whispered, as Doris was about to give a cry, "hush!"

Gently she unclasped the cold dead fingers from the warm living ones, and tenderly laid the poor dead hand upon the bed.

Gently she placed her hand upon the husband's shoulder as she whispered,—

"She has slept her last sleep."

And he, roused from his fitful slumber, wildly gazed at her.

"O God! both dead!"

Then she drew the weeping Doris from the room, and left the husband alone with his dead wife.

So the night was over, and morning had come.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.

November 27th. — A week since Mrs. Gresford Lynn's funeral. We have seen nothing of Mr. Lynn since.

Aunt Lotty has been weeping surreptitiously all the week, when Mr. Carmichael's eye was not upon her. She has made me tell her over and over again all that occurred at Lynncout. I have described the dining-room until she knows it as well as I do. She avoids saying much before Doris, for the poor child is overwhelmed with grief and cannot get over the sad event.

Why do I call it sad? Would I not like to be sleeping now as quietly as Mrs. Lynn is sleeping? I think I would give a great deal to change places with her, and yet perhaps this is wrong. Are not our lots appointed in life; and is it not for us to endure? After all, may there not be more faith in endurance than in the most zealous labours? May not the brightest crowns be given, not to the energetic labourers who have laboured boldly and laboured well, but to those poor souls who have meekly suffered, and yet have faithfully endured to the end?

Mr. Carmichael, strange to say, is also interested in Mrs. Lynn's death, and seems to regret it, but through what combination of ideas I cannot understand, since he is more openly bitter against Mr. Lynn than he has ever been before; and yet I heard him mutter one day:—

“I wish she had not died.”

Odd; but Mr. Carmichael is incomprehensible, and I cannot yet fathom what was his object in allowing Doris to attend the deathbed of Mrs. Lynn.

“The poor little children!” said Aunt Lotty.

And Doris burst out crying.

“What ails the girl?” asks Mr. Carmichael: “is it ‘coming events,’ Doris? Troubles never come singly, eh? There may be more yet in store for Lynncourt.”

“Oh, uncle, what makes you hate them so?” and Doris's head goes down again.

“You would go to Lynncourt. Nothing would have stopped you,” pursued Mr. Carmichael; “and you see the end of it. You won't get over this for three months or more.”

“I'm glad I went.”

“Then what are you mourning over? You knew what you were going to see; and if you are glad that you went you ought to be satisfied.”

“That is not what Doris means,” I begin.

But Mr. Carmichael stops me.

“I have nothing to do with what Doris means—only with

what Doris says; I can't help it if she does not express herself properly."

How can Mr. Carmichael quibble over such a sorrowful subject? But he seems possessed by some malicious demon at the present time. I never saw any one behave in such an extraordinary manner. He seems as if he could not let the matter drop.

Again he begins:

"Mr. Lynn is much cut up, you say?" he says, turning to Aunt Lotty.

"Yes, I heard so," replies Aunt Lotty, timidly.

"Who told you?" demands Mr. Carmichael, sternly; whereat Aunt Lotty becomes nervous, and incoherently murmurs something about a woman who sews sometimes for the Lynns.

"Does she do sewing for you as well?"

"Yes."

"Let her never do any for the future—I'll not go halves with Lynncourt for anything."

Aunt Lotty twitched her knitting pins, and I could see her hands shaking; but the woman in question, depending chiefly on the sewing of Green Oake for a living, Aunt Lotty is emboldened to beg for her.

"It is Letty Jones," she urges.

"Letty Jones must find another employer then," answers Mr. Carmichael, as he walks away.

Then poor Aunt Lotty reproaches herself for having mentioned Letty Jones's name.

"But I am always sure to do wrong—no wonder Mr. Carmichael gets angry," she says. "You see, dearest, I am so inferior to him, I never know just the right thing to do or say."

Just then Doris roused herself up.

"Inferior, Aunt Lotty! You are as superior to Uncle Carmichael as light to darkness. I love you, and I hate Uncle Carmichael. There, I have said it last—I knew I should some time."

"Oh, Doris! Doris!"

"I don't care," returned Doris, impetuously. "Why does he come in that calm, cool way of his, saying all kinds of cruel, disagreeable things, that one has to listen to? It would rouse the spirit of a lamb, and I'm not a lamb, and I don't want to be one. And what is he always hinting at? as if I should wish harm to happen to the Gresford Lynns if I *have* the misfortune to bear the name of Carmichael. I would sooner lie down and die this minute than that any trouble should come near those children."

• And then another marvel happened. Mr. Carmichael put his head into the room again; and now the shade of anger had passed away, and a sort of smile was on his lips.

"You can have Letty Jones again if you please. It is perhaps as well to get accustomed to communicate with Lynncourt."

And then his head disappeared, and Aunt Lotty's spirits revived, and she made some speech about Mr. Carmichael's Christian and forgiving spirit.

But as I saw nothing for him to forgive, I could not respond to it.

And as it was somewhat long and decidedly prosy, I found myself looking out of the window, and falling into quite a different train of thought which was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a stranger approaching the house.

"Who can it be?" said I, overpowering a sentence of Aunt Lotty's that ended with "meekness" or "loving-kindness," I forget which.

"Who what?" asked Aunt Lotty, scattering her little eulogy to the winds.

"A gentleman," said I.

"Perhaps Gabriel," said Doris, starting up and coming nearer the window. "No," she added, in a disappointed tone, "it is only a sort of gentleman."

When the stranger was ushered in he certainly answered to Doris's description. He was half gentlemanly in his dress, and half like a groom. It would have been difficult to define where the gentleman ended and the groom began, or *vice versâ*. He spoke with a free and easy swagger, which might either be affected, or the result of natural vulgarity.

This personage announced himself as Mr. James Withers, an old friend of Mr. Carmichael's.

"Is Hugh at home?" he asked of Aunt Lotty, who sat aghast at the presumption of the man before her; for I question whether she had ever heard Mr. Carmichael spoken of by his Christian name before. Indeed, I doubt if she had ever used it herself, excepting on the occasion of her marriage.

"I think Mr. Carmichael is at home," she replied.

"Ah! The servant wasn't sure; so I said I would come in and wait, for Hugh would be very sorry not to see me. Daresay you have often heard him speak of James Withers."

But Aunt Lotty was unable to reply in the affirmative.

"Ah! indeed;" continued M. Withers. "I'm surprised at that. But Hugh was always a close fellow, and never let out any more than he had occasion to. Not that, sometimes. Ha! ha! ha!" and Mr. Withers laughed.

Aunt Lotty looked uncomfortable.

Mr. Carmichael's step sounded along the passage.

"He always wore creaking boots," remarked Mr. Withers. But as he looked at no one especially, no one felt called upon to reply.

Indeed, we were all in a manner petrified, and were looking at the door, for there was a feeling in all our minds that somehow or other Mr. Carmichael would not be pleased to find Mr. Withers established in the drawing-room.

The door opened.

And Mr. Carmichael entered.

Mr. Withers jumped up.

“How do you do, old fellow? How are you after all the years since I last saw you? Didn’t expect to find you in these parts. All the greater treat, since it wasn’t looked for.”

“Glad to see you, Withers,” replied Mr. Carmichael, and he extended his mouth, in imitation of a smile of greeting. “Where have you been all this time?”

“Buried up in the north,” replied Mr. Withers. “But I’ve been taking a run south, and have been in Devonshire the last six months. I’m on my way home now.”

Mr. Carmichael half suppressed an exclamation.

“The last time we parted was in a land far enough away,” said Mr. Withers. “Do you hear much news from Australia now? Is Bargrave still alive? I suppose not.”

“I don’t know,” returned Mr. Carmichael. “I’m trying to find out.”

“Ha!” said Mr. Withers. “He’d be an old man now. Let me see; fifty, thirty—eighty-four at the very least, and he was not a strong man.”

“No,” replied Mr. Carmichael, in a musing tone. “And you think he must be dead?”

“I should say so.”

“I think so myself, but I want to be sure. I wrote some weeks ago to see if any one could find out anything about him.”

“Have you any particular reason for wanting to know?”

It was a simple question enough, and yet Mr. Carmichael seemed annoyed at it, for he turned the subject.

“Where are you going to from here?” he asked.

“I’m going to stay here a day or two. I’ve put up at the Lynn Arms. By the by, I met two children on my way here, and one of them so reminded me of Jack Gresford, as I remember him before — — —”

I was all attention now. Surely the root of bitterness was going to be revealed. Perhaps Mr. Carmichael had the same idea, for he rose hastily.

“Send some luncheon into my study,” said he to Aunt Lotty. “You will take a glass of wine?” he continued, turning to Mr. Withers, who also rose, and they left the room together.

* * * * *

Surely we shall learn something. Mr. Carmichael has insisted upon Mr. Withers staying at Green Oake for the day or two that he is to be in the neighbourhood. And he pays as much attention to him as he did to Mr. Chester, which Aunt Lotty wonders at.

“I’m sure he is not half so nice a man,” she says. “I can’t see why Mr. Carmichael should be so polite to him. But it’s another evidence of his goodness. He is no respecter of persons.”

Poor Aunt Lotty! Will she ever read Mr. Carmichael aright?

Better that she should not, or a sun will have fallen out of her firmament. And then it will be quite night to her, and it’s twilight more than half the time now.

We are not favoured with much of Mr. Withers's company, and with none of his direct conversation, for Mr. Carmichael engrosses his guest entirely, and keeps up a monotonous flow upon the most wearisome topics. I am sure Mr Withers is bored, though he jokes Mr. Carmichael upon his acquisition of loquacity.

"You used to be such a silent fellow, Hugh. Never had more words than enough, and that short measure for any one. It must be owing to you, ma'am," said Mr. Withers, suddenly turning to Aunt Lotty, who was almost deprived of speech by the unexpected address.

However she contrived to stammer, "Oh, dear no; I do not talk much."

Whereat Mr. Withers laughed louder, and remarked, "Then he's been obliged to do it all, and it's necessity that is the mother of invention."

Which speech he seemed to think very witty, and I was amazed that so punctilious a person as Mr. Carmichael could tolerate such an untoward person.

Mr. Carmichael, however, scrupulously avoids being annoyed. But there has been no mention of John Gresford since, though Doris and I have been on the look out constantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETROSPETTIVE.

MR. CARMICHAEL'S study was a small room at the side of the house, looking into the flower-garden. The walls, as a matter of course, were lined with books, but the books were seldom removed from their shelves excepting by Joyce and Doris, for Mr. Carmichael was no reader. Heavy curtains shaded the windows; the furniture was very handsome and there was a luxuriously stuffed easy-chair on either side of the fireplace.

In this room Mr. Carmichael transacted his business, and here he read his newspapers, and here in fact he spent most of his time. And here the two men stood by the fireplace now, the one the model of a neat and well-dressed gentleman, the other a man of nondescript type. The one a sedate, respectable-looking person; the other, unkempt and disreputable in his appearance. And yet there was an expression decidedly similar upon the face of each as they stood gazing steadfastly at one another. Thus they stood for several seconds, and then Mr. Withers, throwing himself into one of the luxuriously stuffed chairs, spoke.

"Times are changed since we last met, Hugh." And he gazed round the comfortable apartment.

Mr. Carmichael, who had seated himself in the opposite one, nodded.

"You made money after *that*," said Mr. Withers, with emphasis.

Mr. Carmichael winced.

"What's the use of referring to an unpleasant subject, Withers?"

"None at all, except by way of contrast," responded Mr. Withers; and between old friends it's safe enough; there's no one knows anything about it but me and Jack Gresford, if he's still alive."

Mr. Carmichael fidgeted, rose, poked the fire, sat down again, and finally, in a constrained voice, replied,

"John Gresford is still alive, and living in this very place. Those were his boys you met to-day."

Mr. Withers started to his feet.

"Good heavens! then what has induced you to pitch your tent in these parts?"

"I had been settled here ten years or more when he came, and I couldn't well leave."

"Hum! Well you're safe as far as he's concerned."

"Yes. I'm not afraid of that; but it's not agreeable to meet with a living witness of what one would rather forget," said Mr. Carmichael, bitterly.

"Pooh! as long as no one knows, what does it matter?"

He'll never peach now. He didn't before for poor Nelly's sake, and he wouldn't now because he in a manner compounded a felony; besides, there's no legal evidence. Tut, man, you've no need to mind; lift up your head and growl back at him if he gives himself any airs."

To do Mr. Carmichael justice he growled a good deal more than his neighbour, as people who are under deep obligations that they cannot throw off are apt to do. The benefited person often feels as though his benefactor had injured him. And so it was with Mr. Carmichael; he had hated John Gresford all his life; he had begun by doing him injury, which John Gresford had looked over; he had continued to persecute him, and John Gresford had helped him out of a difficulty, — nay, — more than a difficulty, a penal offence, that would have ruined him for life. Certainly he assisted him for the sake of another, but that, under the circumstances, rendered it none the less galling. He was, and would be, John Gresford's debtor to the end of his life, in a matter in which he could never be quits with him.

"And where does Jack Gresford take up his quarters?" asked Mr. Withers.

"At a place close by, left to him by an uncle, whose name he has taken. He's John Gresford Lynn, of Lynncourt, now."

"And the 'Lynn Arms' belongs to him I suppose?"

"Yes, part of the property."

“He’s well off too, then,” mused Mr. Withers; “something of a great man in these parts: would scarcely care to see a friend of early days. Why, I remember him a lad, with hardly a penny wherewith to bless himself, and yet he managed to scrape enough together to get you out of that mess, Hugh.”

“I wish you’d talk about something else,” interrupted Mr. Carmichael, sharply.

“Well, now, I don’t see why one shouldn’t go back to early days. If one’s early faults are repented of, and have been lessons through life, one ought to be obliged to them. You didn’t carry on business over and above scrupulously in those times, but you’ve had to be more particular since, so the warning was beneficial. If I were you I should make quite a moral sentiment out of it, something quite edifying. You were always something of a sticker-up for morals and piety, even in your worst days, and now you’re surrounded with so many blessings,” continued Mr. Withers, assuming a sanctimonious expression, that oddly contrasted with a twinkle in his eye, “that I should think you might practise piety with all the pomp and vanity that this wicked world dresses it up in.”

“What are you driving at, Withers?”

“At a stone wall, it seems, since you can’t understand. I was never much of a church or a chapel-going fellow myself, and didn’t pretend to be, and I’m not more so now;—but I’d lay an even bet that your piety and mine wouldn’t make a

bad couple in a race. I think they'd come in pretty equal in the long run."

Mr. Carmichael did not answer. Mr. Withers's lucubrations decidedly fretted him, but he had his own reasons for wishing to keep on friendly terms with him. Had it suited him at that especial moment to quarrel with him, he would most assuredly have lost no time in turning him out of the house. But it did not suit him, so he remained silent, and awaited Mr. Withers's next speech.

"Jack Gresford was a good-looking fellow, and a sensible one, too. Though he was years younger than we were, Hugh, I don't know any one whose opinion I'd sooner have taken in any matter of business."

"No."

"How cleverly he managed that business for you! How he got the note into his own hands, and paid the money down for it, and then destroyed it before our eyes. You'd have been a ruined man if it hadn't been for that. You'd never have been settled down here. Why, you ought to—"

"Be quiet, Withers," said Mr. Carmichael, in a voice of suppressed rage; "you're enough to drive one mad. Why do you come down to a man's house and bring up old scores in that way?"

"One can't help moralizing when one looks back and sees how different things might have been. Here are you, surrounded with every comfort, and with lots of money, and

with lots of credit; and here am I, a poor fellow who never made a slip of your sort, as poor as a church mouse."

Mr. Carmichael sprang up.

"Withers," said he, "I'll have no more of this."

"I don't mean any offence, Hugh; but when I see you up so high, and I'm down so low in the world, I can't help having a fling at Fortune and her tricks."

"I saved and you spent," suggested Mr. Carmichael.

"Not exactly, I hadn't it to save as you had. Yours came in in the lump, mine in waifs and strays."

"Are you married, Withers?"

"My wife is dead."

"Have you any children?"

"None."

"Would fifty pounds be of any use to you?"

"It would."

"Well, I'm willing to give that to an old friend if he's willing to remain one."

"All right."

"Then you'll stay at Green Oake whilst you're in this neighbourhood?"

"Thank you, Hugh; my purse isn't so heavy but that I shall be glad to save it. I'll come and you may depend upon me. And how about Jack Gresford; am I to see him or not? Won't it be awkward?"

"You're not likely to see him unless you go to church,

which, judging from bygones, you're not very likely to do."

Mr. Withers laughed.

"Besides," continued Mr. Carmichael, "he's going up to London to-morrow or the next day. His wife died about a fortnight since and—"

"Then he did marry?" interrupted Mr. Withers.

"Yes. He went to the Brazils after he turned up in that wonderful manner, when every one thought he had been dead for more than a year; and there he married a Spanish lady, a poor delicate creature, and they came over to England about eight years ago, when old Mr. Lynn died and left John Gresford the property."

"I never heard that he did turn up; I thought he was in his grave long ago. It's years since I left the colonies, and I never hear anything about the folks there now. If Nelly had lived he'd have married her, I suppose," said Mr. Withers.

"Very likely," returned Mr. Carmichael.

And a softer gleam passed over his countenance, the first that had lighted it up since the arrival of Mr. Withers. Had he then any lingering spark of feeling? Could the memory of a dead one have an influence on his cold nature? Perhaps it might, perhaps he felt some degree of gratitude to her for whose sake his guilty business transaction had been covered.

There is a skeleton in every house, says the old proverb: might it not go farther and say a skeleton in every heart?

This was Mr. Carmichael's skeleton. He had lost sight of it for years, he had buried it and placed a great stone over it, but at the sight of John Gresford the tomb had burst open, and the skeleton was raised to life. Time was again producing some effect in re-burying it, when at the appearance of James Withers it again rose up stronger than ever, and confronted its master.

There was but one way in which to lay it, and that was not in Mr. Carmichael's nature.

He had been a bitter enemy of John Gresford's, and in the benefit conferred his hatred was in no whit abated. His dishonesty had not hurt his conscience so much as his respectability; he mourned over it, but did not repent of it; mourned over it as an unlucky step, and wished it had turned out differently. The commission of the act was a matter of little weight with him, but he would have given worlds if John Gresford had not known of it. It was but the once: his business affairs had been since then carried on most creditably, and yet those years of good conduct and good fortune had not laid the spectre.

There was but one way in which he could cast it from him, and that one way it was not in Mr. Carmichael's nature to take. Why did he not go straight to John Gresford and throw off the weight that oppressed him? Why not have said, "John Gresford, I am sorry for the past; it has been repented of."

But he was too proud to humble himself before one whom

he had tried to injure in other ways. He was too proud to ask forgiveness for those injuries. He could not so humiliate himself.

Humiliate! How little men understand humiliation if they deem the confession of wrong humiliates them. A pardon asked is often a debt honestly paid, and a noble nature will impulsively ask it, where a cowardly mean one shrinks from such a reparation.

Therefore Mr. Carmichael's skeleton tormented him, and therefore he tolerated Mr. Withers,—not that he feared Mr. Withers in this matter, for he knew him to be a good-natured fellow, who would not do him an ill turn for old acquaintance's sake.

And though no harm might come of it, it would be as well to keep him from meeting with John Gresford.

So Mr. Carmichael decided, and he managed matters to his satisfaction until just upon the eve of Mr. Withers's departure.

CHAPTER XV.

THEORETICAL.

MISFORTUNES never come singly — so thought Mr. Carmichael.

Had he been in the habit of studying the classics, that reposed in such handsome bindings upon his bookshelves, he would have compared himself to Epimetheus just presented with Pandora's box.

But as Mr. Carmichael was not classical and had never heard of Epimetheus, the simile did not present itself to his mind, therefore he was contented to consider himself as one of the most unlucky men that ever lived. He was annoyed beyond measure, — nothing could have happened so unfortunately. Why could he not be left in peace at Green Oake? It was an out-of-the-way place enough.

Mr. Carmichael had forgotten that there are no out-of-the-way places in the world now. Scarce a place where a man can lose his identity: scarce a place where some one will not turn up, linking him with the great chain of society from which he wishes to sever himself. Impossible! he can't snap it. The great cable winds itself round the world, it

stretches and tightens at the same moment, for as it increases it draws closer together, until like a network it takes in the whole mass of humanity.

And therefore Mr. Carmichael could not get rid of the links that still kept him in connection with the chain, and that though broken were being patched up again. He could not free himself, struggle as he would ; for a subtler power, whom men call Destiny, was at work, and was twisting him into the cord from which he had tried to untwist himself. The Fates were weaving their web, and the warp and woof were getting into knots and tangles. Was Mr. Carmichael skilful enough to keep the fabric smooth? Why had this consternation seized upon him?

It was caused by the unexpected return of Mr. Chester, who had not started so early for the Continent as he had intended, and now having a few days to spare had turned his steps towards Green Oake.

Mr. Carmichael devoutly wished he had turned them anywhere else, but he did not say so. On the contrary, he invited Mr. Chester to stay at Green Oake, and Mr. Chester accepted the invitation.

“What will he think of Mr. Withers, I wonder?” was Aunt Lotty’s inward meditation.

Perhaps Mr. Carmichael’s meditations coincided with those of his wife. If so, they shaped themselves from thought into action, for Mr. Carmichael suddenly announced that he

was going over to Winstowe, and wished to take Mr. Withers with him.

And Mr. Withers not caring for ladies' society, and having likewise had *his* meditations, and having arrived at the conclusion that the newcomer was by no means "a man of his sort," was nothing loth to accept the impromptu offer. And so the two departed.

Doris gave a sigh of relief.

"How delightful!"

(Aunt Lotty of course not being in the room).

Mr. Chester turned to Joyce.

"Have you been dreaming much lately, Miss Dormer?"

Joyce looked up in wonder. Doris laughed.

"That is just like Gabriel."

"What do you mean, Doris?"

"Why, your thoughts have gone wandering as they often do, and Gabriel has found it out. But I wish you'd find out more, Gabriel, for Joyce is dreaming a story, and I can't make out what it is about. I believe it's all in her diary, but I'm not to read that till I'm quite an old woman, and that's a long time to wait. Can't you find out the plot for me!"

"Perhaps I might if I were Odin, and had a couple of wonderful ravens to collect information."

"Who were the ravens?"

"Hugo and Mumin, Thought and Memory. Hugo would perch on Miss Dormer's shoulder and penetrate the secrets

of her brain, whilst Mumin would remember everything that Hugo revealed and bring it home to me at night, and I could tell you in the morning. But you see my unassisted powers won't enable me to do this, and these wonderful birds died out with Odin."

"What strange fancies those old-world people had, and yet the birds have a curious poetic meaning about them," said Doris.

"Yes, it was the way with the old-world people to materialize attributes, and some of their conceits are very beautiful."

"And to idealize facts also, was it not?" said Joyce. "I have often thought that old myths are but a figurative rendering of mind and matter. A fact was figuratively dressed, and then the idealization grew into fact again, until the fact that gave it being was lost, and its new garb became an accepted truth."

"Lord Bacon had the same sort of idea," replied Mr. Chester; "that every Greek myth, if people would take the pains to decipher it, is but the typification of some phase of nature. It was the genius of the early nations to idealize in this way; a sort of struggle out of the chaos of ignorance in which the growing mind found itself; the effort of an uncultured brain teeming with impulsive intuitions. See how the Gothic soul explained to itself the wonders of creation, and called up in sublime superstition giants whose wrath was thundered forth in the devastating storm and the fierce

wind: whilst greater than the giants in his power and in his perfections rose the sun-god to send peace and plenty upon the earth. But what has all this to do with the point we started from — Miss Dormer's day-dream, or story that she is dreaming?"

Joyce looked deprecatingly at Doris, but Doris took no heed of her.

"Who is the hero or heroine?" asked Mr. Chester.

"I cannot make out," said Doris, "it cannot possibly be Uncle Carmichael, and I'm certain it's not you. The story must be some sort of a personifying of ideas until a group of living characters moves around her. Perhaps she brings up pixies and water nymphs, for I think she has made a good deal of it up whilst we have been out boating."

"What nonsense you are talking, Doris!"

"Not at all; you confessed to a story."

"Doris does not understand," said Joyce, appealing to Mr. Chester, "one lives in a tale sometimes, besides living one's actual life."

"I don't know," interrupted Doris; "I think sometimes that what you call the actual life is not half so real as the one lived within one's self."

"We are getting metaphysical," said Mr. Chester. "How many lives are you going to give to people?"

"I should give two," said Joyce.

"I should give three," said Doris.

“I should give one,” said Mr. Chester. “Well, Miss Dormer?”

“An outer and an inner life,” said Joyce, in answer; “the one we are compelled to live, the other we make for ourselves.”

“Hum! doubtful,” responded Mr. Chester. “Now, Doris.”

“The actual life, by which I mean living surrounded by outward circumstances, performing a daily routine; then the mind, then the soul—”

“You put mind and soul together, Miss Dormer?” said Mr. Chester, turning to her.

“I did so, but perhaps I might divide them like Doris, for the two may be separated; though I had considered the two as making up the inner life.”

“What is the soul?”

“The immortal part.”

“And the mind?”

“The intelligent, thinking part.”

“Does not the soul think, act, receive, and is it not intelligent?”

Joyce looked a little puzzled.

“All people,” said she, after a moment’s hesitation, “have a soul.”

“Yes.”

“But all have not mind; a lunatic, for instance, is bereft of mind, and yet he has a soul. Would not that prove the existence of two distinct elements?”

"Is his soul responsible in such a case?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because there is no mind to influence it."

"Is he accountable for his actions?"

"No."

"Therefore he is not a perfect being; for not one of those three elements that Doris calls lives is acting its individual part, is capable of maintaining what Doris would call a life irrespective of the others. For a perfect being there must be a union of the three elements to make one perfect life. I prefer your theory of the two lives, Miss Dormer, though that can only be carried out to a certain extent; for our inner life can never be insensible to outer effects. It is influenced by the outer life, and cannot have an entirely separate existence. Joy and sorrow do not arise in our hearts of themselves. Thoughts even are suggestions of the outer life, no inner life being independent of extraneous causes."

"You tie me down a little too closely, Mr. Chester. All I meant was that one might lead a very matter-of-fact, quiet life, and yet in the inner life be living a sort of story."

"You don't tie me down though, Gabriel, for I believe in my three lives still," said Doris.

Mr. Chester smiled.

"You want the three to make one, Doris; the one won't divide into three."

„You never believe in anything, Gabriel.”

“Don’t I? But go on with Miss Dormer’s story.”

“As far as I can make it out, it is this: — Once upon a time two princesses came to an enchanted castle: a giant was the owner of it, but I can’t tell you his name. He was an exceedingly dreadful giant, and if it had not been for his wife he would have been unbearable. He did not drink barrels of mead and eat whole oxen, but he made everyone around afraid of him. I’m sure of the story so far, but the part I can’t make out is what is going to happen to the two princesses, for Joyce won’t let out the plot.”

“And I’m not to be the hero?”

“No, she does not appreciate you sufficiently, Gabriel.”

Mr. Chester looked at Joyce, but he could not see her face, for it was half-turned away; she felt very much vexed with Doris.

“May I ask wherein I have offended?” asked Mr. Chester.

Joyce turned round.

“You must not believe what Doris says. I hope I do everyone justice.”

“There,” said Doris, “that is just what I object to; people are for ever talking of justice, and justice is such a poor beggarly element in this world’s creed. It means allowing just as much as you’re obliged to, and not an atom over. I hope no one will ever do *me* justice; I’d much rather they wouldn’t.”

“What would you have more than justice, Doris?” asked Mr. Chester.

“I’m not talking about justice as it ought to be perhaps; but justice as it is. In fact, I don’t believe there is any at all, and I quite believe in the old story that Justice left the earth in the golden ages, and that now she only looks upon it from afar, or pays it a hasty visit now and then. She never stays very long, not feeling at home there.”

“Then you would appeal to Miss Dormer’s mercy in my behalf, and pray her to make me a hero in the story.”

“I believe,” said Doris, suddenly, “that Mr. Withers is part of the story: he is an ogre who could tell something about the giant that he does not want known.”

Joyce started.

And here to her relief Aunt Lotty came into the room, and so the conversation turned upon different subjects.

And at night Joyce took out her diary and made a long entry.

I can’t help thinking that there is something in what Doris says, else why should Mr. Carmichael be so attentive to such a man. Besides, how anxious he is to prevent his conversing with any one. There is another thing I can’t make out—he does not seem to mind about Mr. Chester’s being with Doris now. It can’t be—no—Mr. Chester cares as much for Doris as ever, and Doris seems even fonder of him. I can’t make it out.

I'm sure I heard Mr. Carmichael tell Mr. Withers that Doris was his brother's daughter. It might have been a slip for sister, but I think not; for I looked at him at the moment, and I'm sure he went just the least bit in the world red; and that's a very unusual thing for Mr. Carmichael.

Perhaps, after all, he may have a little conscience. But certainly his statements do not agree with one another.

I have been lecturing Doris for all that she said this afternoon to Mr. Chester; but I make no impression upon her. She says she shall not rest until I thoroughly appreciate him. I'm sure I do now; more's the pity, for the next thing will be his coming as a shadow between us.

Oh, Doris, Doris! if you could only see what you are doing, you would be sorry for your work. It's easier to do than to undo; and I don't want to get envious and jealous. Oh! whatever happens, I trust that no jealousy will ever enter my heart. It's the one thing above all others I scorn. I can suffer anything; but let me keep myself from this meanness of soul.

Ah! how foolish I am. There is Doris looking more lovely than ever; like a fragile spirit moving about. What a loving creature she is—so impulsive, so thoughtless! I could see Mr. Chester watching her all the time. He spoke to me about the packet again, and made me promise to write if any need should arise.

"I can't understand about this fortune that is to come to Doris," said he. "Mr. Carmichael tells me he must get some

information from Australia before he can proceed farther in the matter. He says he has all his evidence ready, and that it is clear and decisive; that he thinks there will be no difficulty."

"I don't understand him," I said.

"Neither do I," returned Mr. Chester. "He's some interest himself in the matter; for though he would naturally be anxious to secure a fortune for his niece, yet there's an eagerness and an air of triumph about him that I cannot comprehend."

"He cannot want the money for himself," I answered: "he seems to have no lack, and there is only my aunt and himself."

"No, I don't think it is money," replied Mr. Chester, thoughtfully.

"Have you any idea from whom this money is to come?"

"No, I never heard Mrs. Carmichael speak of her husband. I believe my mother knew the whole story, but she never said anything about it. All I know is, that she was in Australia at the time of her husband's death; he died or was killed in an expedition up the country. Mrs. Carmichael remained there three months afterwards, and then set sail for England; but the vessel met with a storm a few days out and went down. Only a few managed to get into the boats, and of those in the boat with Mrs. Carmichael only Doris and herself were saved. They were picked up by a Spanish vessel and taken to Lisbon, from whence after

great hardships she succeeded in making her way to England with her daughter. She seemed to have no relatives but this one brother; therefore I cannot imagine where this property is to come from."

Perhaps, I thought, Mr. Withers may know something about it, and that is why Mr. Carmichael and he have been over to Winstowe; but I did not mention it to Mr. Chester. I don't know why, but I had a dislike to his thinking that Mr. Withers could in any way be mixed up in family affairs.

I know Mr. Chester must think him a very odd person. Aunt Lotty thinks so too.

"My dear," she said to me, "I wish some one could tell Mr. Chester that Mr. Withers has never been at Green Oake before, and that I had never heard of him until the other day. I would do it myself, but I know I should make some blunder over it."

So I was glad to see that Aunt Lotty had my views; for if one doubts one's own wisdom it is a comfort to think that others can be equally foolish.

CHAPTER XVI.

IS THERE TRUTH IN DREAMS?

SLEEP reigned supreme in the household of Green Oake. The owner of the wonderful umbrella chronicled in fairy lore made his way from chamber to chamber and held it over the head of each sleeper in turn, and to each sleeper came dreams in consequence.

Mr. Withers went back to early days and the multiplication table. He multiplied five by ten, and then proved the fact to himself by arranging golden sovereigns in separate heaps and counting them carefully over. And as he counted them they melted all at once into a lump, and the lump changed into a long thread that shot far away like a slender serpent, and he followed its windings till he found himself up in the north at the bar of "The Sailor and Mermaid," and there in his dreams he rested.

Mr. Carmichael was by no means so comfortable whilst the umbrella overshadowed him. He started and was uneasy, for in the distance he saw James Withers and Mr. Chester walking arm-in-arm, and Mr. Lynn rapidly overtaking them. He gave a plunge, and knocking the enchanted umbrella off the bed, awoke in the darkness.

Then the umbrella owner vanished, and lo! Doris was sobbing in her sleep over the Lynn children, who lay bruised and wounded at her feet, whilst an angel stood sorrowfully gazing at her, saying in the low, sweet tone she well remembered, "How could you harm them?" And then her dream was over, and Joyce's began, but it was so confused she could make nothing of it. There were plenty of pictures painted on the umbrella, but something had blurred them and she could make nothing out clearly, so knew not whether they would serve to illustrate her story or not. The only one that stood out at all distinctly was one of Doris and Mr. Chester working at a large painting together. And as she watched a beautiful landscape seemed to grow beneath their fingers, with majestic forest trees in the foreground, whilst across the blue lake the sun descending in golden glory behind the distant hills, threw a pathway of light. And it seemed a vision to her of the life before those two, and she knew that it was an illustration of the tale she was weaving. No wonder she could see nothing else; what did aught else matter to her?

The umbrella opened no future to Mr. Chester, it only showed him the past, and he was once again receiving the packet from Mrs. Carmichael, who, with tears in her eyes, besought him to take care of Doris if ever she needed it. And somehow Mrs. Carmichael changed into Joyce Dormer, though why Joyce Dormer should give him a packet he could not make out, and he became bewildered, and a great wheel

went spinning round, showing a fresh face at every revolution: first it was Mr. Carmichael, then Mr. Withers, and then Joyce Dormer, and they all seemed trying to say something to him, only the wheel went round so fast that they had not time to speak, but he knew that there was some connection with Joyce Dormer's story, of which he never could be the hero, so after all what had he to do with it?

And thus the night wore on and morning came, and the sleepers awoke, and rubbing their eyes, wondered whether they could have been dreaming, since everything had seemed so real.

Mr. Carmichael soon convinced himself of the fact that it was an impossibility for Mr. Withers, Mr. Chester, and Mr. Lynn to have been together during the night, and he resolved if he could by any means prevent it, that they should not meet during the day. And he shook off the visions of the night and subsided into a calmer state of mind.

Mr. Withers assured himself of the untransmuted state of the precious metal and the correctness of his little calculation, by opening the pocket-book that had been filled at Winstowe the day before.

But the others not having anything especial to realise, could not wholly divest themselves of the phases of feeling through which they had passed, and so descended to the breakfast room half-shadowed still by the marvellous

umbrella that had been so effective during the night-time.

Mr. Carmichael and Mr. Withers had been up very early that morning, and had almost finished breakfast before the rest of the party appeared.

"My last morning," said Mr. Withers; "so I am making the most of it, you see."

The fifty sovereigns in his pocket-book had emboldened him to address Mr. Chester, although he did not feel quite at ease with him.

"Are you travelling far to-day?" inquired Mr. Chester.

"As far as I can go, I'm northward bound. You're on the wing, too, I hear?"

"Yes, but my path is southward."

"Over the seas, I suppose?"

"Not exactly, I'm only going to cross the channel."

"Oh, ah! I see — going among the Frenchmen and the foreigners."

Why Mr. Withers separated Frenchmen from foreigners perhaps even Mr. Withers himself could not have explained. But having done so, he paused, and then another thought striking him he added,—

"Southward with me means far enough away, over the seas to where Hugh and I spent many a day in the best years of our lives."

Aunt Lotty was horror-stricken. Mr. Withers had actually spoken of Mr. Carmichael as Hugh, in Mr. Chester's

presence. What must Mr. Chester think of his being familiar with such a person?

Mr. Carmichael waxed uncomfortable, also; but his feelings had no connection with those of Aunt Lotty.

And Mr. Chester, still under the shadow of the umbrella, saw the wheel going round with only Mr. Withers' face presenting itself, and he had a vague idea that Mr. Withers was going to reveal what there had not been time to tell him in the dream. Wherefore he asked,—

“And where was that?”

“In Australia, to be sure,” responded Mr. Withers, wholly unconscious of the stern glance Mr. Carmichael was directing towards him, and utterly unaware of a large slice of ham to which Mr. Carmichael was endeavouring to call his attention.

“Oh, thank you, yes, what?” said Mr. Withers, suddenly becoming alive to both facts. Then holding out his plate he received the ham in silence, and became absorbed in consuming it.

Mr. Chester pursued his questioning.

“Is it long since you were in Australia, Withers?”

But Mr. Carmichael gave him no time to reply. Assuming a careless tone, he answered for him.

“About five-and-twenty years, Withers, is it not?” and he looked fixedly at Mr. Withers.

“Five-and-twenty, yes,” assented Mr. Withers; “I think it must be about that.”

"That was before your Australian days, Doris," said Mr. Chester, dreamily, helping himself to a piece of dry toast.

Mr. Withers put down his knife and fork and stared earnestly at Doris. He looked thoroughly perplexed.

"He evidently knows nothing about the fortune," thought Mr. Chester, and he went on with his toast.

Doris had caught Mr. Withers' look of perplexity.

"I was only in Australia a few months, Mr. Withers. I was quite a baby when I left, and so I don't remember anything about it."

But this explanation, instead of diminishing Mr. Withers' perplexity, served only to increase it.

"I did not know that Charles——" he began, looking at Mr. Carmichael.

But Mr. Carmichael interrupted him.

"Oh, I thought I had told you about that, Withers. Well, never mind it now; some other time."

And Mr. Withers, thinking that silence and the fifty pounds in his pocket had possibly some connection, (for how else could he interpret the significant nod that Mr. Carmichael bestowed upon him?) made no reply.

And Joyce felt satisfied that Mr. Carmichael had made no slip on the previous evening, and that Charles was the brother referred to.

Breakfast went on without further allusion to Australia, and Mr. Withers set to work and made a fresh meal as heartily as though he had eaten nothing before.

There were two things that gave Aunt Lotty great comfort: first, that Mr. Withers was going away at twelve o'clock, and therefore he had not very much longer to stay; secondly, that Mr. Chester had put off his departure until the following day; for Mr. Chester brought sunlight to poor Aunt Lotty, and she would like to bask in a little more warmth ere the winter set in.

She placidly watched him and Doris, and settled in her own mind what a charming couple they would make, and what a pleasant thing it would be to have a wedding at Green Oake. There would be so much to do that she should have to give up her knitting for she could not tell how long, and so the knitting would last on indefinitely. Joyce would be one bridesmaid, but where to get others she did not know. Doris had no friends; but perhaps Mr. Chester might have a sister or a cousin, or some one he might like to ask, but then two bridesmaids were not enough in these days. She wished it could be as it was at her own marriage, when one was considered sufficient. And Doris's dress! If Doris came into this fortune she ought to have a very handsome one, perhaps white satin. But still she could not fancy Doris in white satin. And so she went rambling on, and she saw more pleasant pictures in her day-dreams than any of those who were still to a certain extent under the influence of the magic umbrella, they had seen in the night.

Man may plan, but man can't always execute; and so Mr.

Carmichael found it. He had triumphed at the breakfast-table, and prevented the communication between Mr. Chester and James Withers that had so much troubled him in his dreams.

But he could not go on for ever with Fortune always on his side.

Fortune, being a fickle dame, can never be reckoned upon even by her favourites.

And Mr. Carmichael had enjoyed her patronage longer perhaps than he deserved.

Fortune in Mr. James Withers' estimation was at the present time veering round in his direction. His chancing to pass through Craythorpe, and there by accident hearing of his old friend, had turned out so very much to his advantage.

He could not help wondering, however, what had put it into Hugh's head to give him fifty pounds, for Hugh used to be pretty close with his money; "but it was a friendly thing to do, when he saw I wanted it, and I'm bound to him in consequence," soliloquised Mr. Withers, who had strayed from the garden into the road, and straying down the road, smoked his cigar and felt at peace with himself and the world in general.

So completely engrossed was he in his pleasurable cogitations that he did not notice that some one was coming behind him, nor that some one was on a line with him, nor that some one had passed him, and had half turned round,

and then had quite turned round, and was standing looking at him.

The church-clock chimed the three-quarters—a quarter to twelve—he must be returning. His eyes had been bent on the ground, but he now raised them and saw a gentleman in mourning steadfastly regarding him. He saw more, he saw a face he had known over twenty years ago. It was a boyish face then, but the twenty odd years had only given it manliness, without interfering much with its boyish beauty, so that he recognised it at once.

And the face gazing so earnestly on the battered, worn face of James Withers recognised therein the features of an old acquaintance who was decidedly the worse for wear, yet still to be identified.

“Withers!” exclaimed Mr. Lynn; “is it possible?”

“Jack!” returned Mr. Withers, taking the offered hand, and forgetting Mr. Carmichael’s enmity to the man before him; “we three never expected to meet in this way.”

“Three?” said Mr. Lynn, interrogatively.

“Three,” repeated Mr. James Withers; “me, you, and Hugh Carmichael.”

“I don’t know Mr. Carmichael,” said Mr. Lynn, coldly.

And suddenly in the breast of James Withers rose the desire to become a mediator, not from any benevolent ideas on his part but from purely selfish intentions. If he could be friendly at both Lynncourt and Green Oake, it would be

very desirable. He saw it at once—he had lived too long a hand-to-mouth life to be insensible of opportunities, or to neglect making the most of them.

Fortune had put the cue into his hand, and it was for him to make the best game he could.

“No, you *don't*,” returned Mr. Withers: “he’s an altered man, he’s been kind to me, and he’s good to those nieces of his that haven’t a penny.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” replied Mr. Lynn, stiffly: “but I heard Miss Carmichael was an heiress.”

“I don’t believe it; it’s some tale or other. She’s poor Charley’s daughter, it seems, and he’d never anything to leave, I’m certain.”

“Charles was the best, by far. Poor Charles!”

“And came to the worst end. He died of drinking, Hugh says, more than eighteen years ago.”

“And Miss Carmichael is poor Charles’s daughter. I should like to see her sometimes for the sake of old times,” said Mr. Lynn.

“She’s a pretty girl enough, too,” said Mr. Withers, meditatively; “but she does not feature any of the family. I wonder who her mother was?”

“I have no communications with Green Oake,” said Mr. Lynn. “But if you will take a message for me I shall be greatly obliged. Will you tell her that my little boys often ask for her, and want to see her?”

"It's a pity you and Hugh don't make it up," said Mr. Withers.

A deep flush came over Mr. Lynn's face.

"You do not understand, Withers," said he; "we may forgive, but there are some things in the past that can never be forgotten."

"I believe," pondered Mr. Withers, "that Jack's about as implacable as Hugh." Then he said aloud, "Well, of course you know your own business best; but to me it seems that when old acquaintances meet there's nothing like being jolly."

As Mr. Withers gave utterance to this sentiment, a third person appeared on the scene, this third person having emerged from the garden, and having come in search of Mr. Withers.

And found him!

Yes, found him. And Mr. Carmichael stood petrified with rage and dismay, for the shadowy fear of the night-season was a reality. James Withers and Mr. Gresford Lynn had met!

He turned back, and sent a boy, who was working in the garden, to go and tell Mr. Withers that the dog-cart was waiting, and that Mr. Carmichael was ready to drive him to the station.

Then Mr. Withers awoke to a sense of his delinquency; for had he not been conversing amicably with his friend's enemy for full ten minutes by the church clock?

"But he's no enemy of mine, and I can't see that I've done any harm."

And as Mr. Carmichael in the course of the drive, after a sharp cross-questioning, also decided that no harm had been done, he parted with Mr. Withers in an amicable manner.

He came, however, to two conclusions on his way home.

First, that he had thrown away fifty pounds; secondly, that he would not mind if the girls were now and then to take some notice of the Lynn children.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REMNANT OF THE DARK AGES.

MR. CARMICHAEL, returning from speeding his parting guest, was in a much better frame of mind than he had been in at breakfast-time.

Matters had certainly not taken the course he had intended; still, on the whole, he was not dissatisfied, indeed he was by no means sure but that everything had happened for the best, and that the interview with Mr. Lynn had been a gain instead of an injury.

So Mr. Carmichael arrived at home in a better temper than he had set out in, and Aunt Lotty, nervously taking a glance at him, felt assured that the storm she had seen gathering in the morning had passed away.

"Did you see Mr. Withers off?" she asked.

It was a bold effort on the part of Aunt Lotty, who was not in the habit of asking for information. But Mr. Carmichael being, on this morning, disposed to be gracious, replied in a tolerably polite affirmative.

And Aunt Lotty looked pleased and was very near making another remark; but not feeling sure that a second effort

might meet with the same success, she wisely remained silent, quietly smiling to herself, investing her ideal picture of Mr. Carmichael with another coat of varnish, and giving an extra polish to the frame.

Then Mr. Carmichael's eye fell upon Joyce, who was sitting with her aunt.

"When does Mr. Chester leave England, Joyce?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"How long will he be away?"

"All winter, until quite summer, I think."

"So much the better." Then looking round the room, he asked,—

"Where's Doris?"

"In the drawing-room. Mr. Chester is there."

"And why are you not there?"

"Mr. Chester was talking to her about her mother, and I — I thought I might be in the way."

Mr. Carmichael uttered an impatient exclamation.

"I wonder you have not more sense, Joyce, after what I said to you. You will please to return to the drawing-room. How long is it since you left?"

"About half-an-hour."

Mr. Carmichael looked livid with anger; still he merely said, in a slow, suppressed voice, "Go back at once;" and he left the room.

"I don't like to go back," said she, rising slowly.

Aunt Lotty looked puzzled.

"No, dear; but still Mr. Carmichael thinks you ought. It seems a pity, they must have so much to say. I can't see why Mr. Carmichael should object to their being together. It's the most natural thing in the world that they should like one another, and very desirable too, for Mr. Chester has more than enough to live upon, and I don't see that there's any fault to find with him. Do you?"

"No."

"I had planned it all so nicely, dear, and you were to be bridesmaid; and I thought how pleasant it would be to have a wedding at Green Oake. How we should all enjoy it!"

The girl made no answer; she felt her heart quivering, but she knew that Aunt Lotty had no idea of the secret that was nestling there. Oh! if there were no secret, how much happier she should be. She must turn it out; why had it crept in like a cruel serpent to mar her quiet life?

Poor Joyce! she had never seen a hero before, and so had magnified this one accordingly, and had bestowed an amount of hero-worship upon him that was growing into something deeper, do what she would to prevent it.

"The course of true love never did run smooth," quoted Aunt Lotty. She was not given to quotations, but this one every one knows, and it had been a favourite with her in bygone days, and indeed at the time of her own engagement had been almost a stumbling-block, since her own love experiences ran in so exceedingly smooth and untroubled a

stream that she was inclined at times to doubt whether it could be the "true love" that it ought to be.

"It never did," repeated Aunt Lotty; "at least, not often," she added, in correction, as though excusing something to herself.

"No," responded Joyce.

"Ah, dear, I see you're just as sorry about it as I am; still we must not go against Mr. Carmichael, he knows so much better than we do. So I think you had better go now, Joyce."

"Yes," said Joyce, and she moved slowly away. She walked equally slowly across the hall, and placed her hand on the handle of the door. She opened it.

Mr. Chester was putting his sketches into his portfolio, whilst seated in an arm-chair near him was Doris, busily engaged in severing a long brown lock from her head.

"You're just in time," said she, as Joyce entered; "I was going to send Gabriel for you. I'm going to give him a charm to keep him safe whilst he is away: I want a piece of your hair to plait with mine; so sit down and let me cut it off. Gabriel ought to be very proud of it."

But Joyce put her hands away.

"No, Doris; your own is sufficient."

"Nonsense!" replied Doris. "I must have yours as well. Gabriel, do ask Joyce to give it to you; the knot won't be perfect without."

"I should not dare to ask Miss Dormer so great a favour," said Mr. Chester, without looking at Joyce.

"He must say something," thought she; "and perhaps he's said the best he can under the circumstances. He does not want it."

But she did not speak.

Doris looked disappointed.

"Don't you wish well to Gabriel? Remember, it's a long journey."

Did she not wish him well? She was glad Doris was blind, and Mr. Chester, too: so she tried to turn the matter off jestingly.

"How long have you believed in talismans, Doris? The dark ages must be coming back again if a twist of plaited hair will avail against the dangers of land and sea."

"I have my own little superstitions, Joyce. I don't disbelieve in everything that is not quite prosaic and matter of fact; and I do believe we should all be the better for a little touch of romance to soften our hard calculating hearts. I don't mind a little credulity now and then: it shows one that there is still faith in the world—unquestioning faith that has a touch of the beautiful in it, though people may be called fools for possessing it."

"What a grandiloquent speech, Doris," said Mr. Chester; "and not quite to the point, either."

"I was not thinking of points, and I don't care about them; one thing sends one's thoughts straying off into

another, and—but I must return to my point, I see. I don't suppose that the knot of hair will act as a life-preserver, but I do think that every time Gabriel looks at it, it will lighten his heart to think that there are two people caring for his safety."

"I am sure," said Joyce, raising her eyes at last to Mr. Chester's, "that I sincerely hope you will meet with no dangers on your journey;" and she met his eyes looking doubtfully at her.

He did not believe her.

Doris shook her head.

"I don't like set speeches, Joyce; and I can't think why you persist in shutting Gabriel out of your story."

"Perhaps whilst I am away I may meet with some danger, or do something heroic enough to entitle me to a place in it." And again Mr. Chester looked at Joyce.

"Yes, but you ought to be in it now; and I think if Joyce would let me plait her hair with mine for you, that it would in some way make her take an interest in you. It's a sort of superstition I have, Joyce; I must have my own way with people I like. There are so few in the world for me to care about, or to care for me, that I must have all those I love love one another. I shall look upon you as Gabriel's enemy and mine, if you refuse to grant my request."

Mr. Chester's enemy!—The idea was not pleasant; still, perhaps, it was better that it should be so.

"And *my* enemy, too," repeated Doris.

"Oh no; not *your* enemy, Doris!

"But *mine*, am I to understand, Miss Dormer?" asked Mr. Chester, laughing; yet there was a grave look in his eyes.

Joyce felt her face growing crimson; but she looked up steadily, and answered,—

"No, Mr. Chester; not your enemy."

"But unless you give part of the talisman, he will have no proof of it."

"I think Mr. Chester will believe me without that."

"Better with," said Mr. Chester, softly.

Joyce half started. Ah, no! It is for Doris's sake. He cannot bear to see her vexed. And then she raised her eyes once more.

Mr. Chester's doubting look was gone, and he gazed kindly at her.

Could she refuse?

Had he not in a manner asked for it?

"There!" exclaimed Doris, triumphantly. "I knew if Gabriel would only ask himself you could not say no. Dear old Gabriel always has his own way."

And again Joyce felt how foolish she was; but she had not said "Yes" yet. She would show she was not to be persuaded; she would have some strength, and she would say "No."

Alas, it was too late, for Doris had dexterously unloosed

the long fair locks, and had severed one tress from its companions, which she now held up in triumph.

“And now I may weave and weave, and as I weave I shall sing a magic song; but no one will know what it is but myself, or the charm would be broken.”

But Mr. Chester, quietly stepping to Doris, took the shining lock from her hand, and laid it before Joyce.

“I cannot accept stolen property, Miss Dormer. The lock must be fairly given.”

What was Joyce to do? Why had Doris brought her into so uncomfortable a position? Had she obeyed her impulse, she would have seized the severed lock, and have thrown it into the blazing fire. But she remembered how she had allowed her feeling to manifest itself on the occasion of the sketching attempt, and she determined to act less hastily this time. She saw that Doris looked really annoyed, and she felt vexed with herself at bringing about anything approaching a scene. With some effort, therefore, she took up the piece of hair, and turning to Doris, said, —

“We will not quarrel over it, Doris. I give you my contribution towards the talisman.”

But Mr. Chester still was not satisfied.

“Pardon me; it is not quite right yet. You must give it freely, or it will be of no avail.”

“I have given it freely,” said Joyce. “I give it freely to Doris for you.”

Mr. Chester did not look as if he were quite satisfied even with that, though he answered, "I suppose I must be content, Miss Dormer."

And Doris wove the dark and the light tress into a complicated braid.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.

AND Mr. Chester has gone! Really gone this time, and we shall not see him again until summer. He seemed pleased with Doris's talisman, and admired the contrast of the dark and light hair, and complimented Doris upon the workmanship. It is evident why he prizes it.

Doris wonders I will not let him come into my story. Oh, Doris, Doris! how little you know —— But how am I proceeding with my story? I seem to have come to a standstill. Mr. Carmichael is altogether inexplicable. At one moment he seems angry if Doris and Mr. Chester are left together. At another he does not care about it. His mind appears to be swayed by contrarieties.

Doris's account as far as it went was correct enough. The two princesses, as she chooses to style us, have certainly arrived at the castle, but the wonderful adventures that are to happen have not yet befallen us. Us, I say; but I don't suppose anything is going to happen to me, that I'm quite clear about; it's all straightforward, and there's no mystery, but I can't understand about Doris. Mr. Chester believes

that she is the daughter of Mr. Carmichael's sister, and so does Doris herself, but Mr. Withers has evidently received the impression that she is the daughter of Mr. Carmichael's brother. I knew I was not wrong about the slip that night, that it was no slip.

Neither can I understand why Mr. Carmichael speaks more feelingly about Mrs. Gresford Lynn's death, and says what a blank it must cause at Lynncourt, and how sad for the children; and has actually inquired if we have seen them lately, not as though he feared, but as if he hoped we had. But of course we have not.

He seemed so anxious upon the point that Aunt Lotty asked if she might send to inquire. But to this he did not assent.

"I wish to make no advances to Mr. Lynn," said he, and then turning to me he added, "I don't want you or Doris to take up my quarrels. I don't object to your speaking to Mr. Lynn or the children, if you should chance to meet them."

"Could we ask if the children might come here?" asked Aunt Lotty, timidly, for her heart yearned towards the motherless little ones.

But Mr. Carmichael's stern "No," prevented her urging the matter.

"But you see, Joyce dear," said she, when Mr. Carmichael left the room, "that there is no objection to your seeing them

if an opportunity occurred. Perhaps you might make an opportunity; I should so like to hear something about them."

But the snow falls fast, and I do not see how we are to make the opportunity Aunt Lotty speaks of. As I look from my porch window it is all one white sheet before me, and the branches of the trees are coated over, and the fir-trees support great masses of snow on their thick spiky bristles. It comes down, down, down, and I watch the flakes whirling past the window, and think of the days when I used to believe in the nursery legend, and used to sit and wonder at the numbers of chickens Mother Carey must have to pluck. Mother Carey, too, presented herself to my mind as I used to imagine her, a gigantic woman, with peaked hat and spectacles, but withal of a good-humoured countenance, and possessed of a vast amount of patience, as she sat on pillows of snow, plucking feathers for snowbeds. I never considered what became of the poor stripped chickens. The one great fact of the down-falling of the feathers overpowered me as they came whirling down and settling upon the window-sill, and upon the ground, and upon the hedges and upon everything. And if my mind did stray from this one great fact, it did not revert to causes, but leaped forward to results, and I pictured snow-balls, and snow-men, and quite forgot the poor shivering snow-birds.

And now, as I sit here, up comes the old train of thought, and it seems to me that a great cloud that has

been eclipsing the past is rolled away, and I am once more a little child.

It is very refreshing to call up these old thoughts and feelings, to propitiate the angel with the flaming sword, and once again to be in Paradise—the paradise that once in a lifetime comes to all on earth, the few brief months ere yet our eyes are opened to know good and evil; months, I call them, for they scarce amount to years, when first we have a sense of the wonderful “Me” that is to pass through so many phases.

It is curious to look back upon the development of that “Me.” To realise that the “Me” that now exists was the „Me” that existed then, and to watch the progress of that „Me” as it passed from the Wonder-ages into the world of reality; when it first awoke from its dream-life, and found a world of substance instead of shadow, with rough paths and steep hill-sides to clamber, and hedges thick with thorns, and the roses growing so high that it is well-nigh impossible to reach them.

And so I mused: I saw the „Me” of long ago in white frocks and red shoes, hoping to find fairies curled up in the large white lily-buds, or sitting with folded hands and open eyes listening to wild stories without a question of their truth, for this was the age of Belief, when the soul is impressionable, and is an unsown field ready to receive seed; and the seed sowed then takes deep root, though often it does not spring up for years afterwards.

And then the "Me" begins to use its senses, to test its sight by touch, to satisfy its wonder by tasting, and so finds itself in the age of Discovery—age ever increasing, and growing even more a wondering age than the Wonder-age itself; for beauty is not now the only phase of which it is conscious, since with the beauty comes deformity, with harmony discord, with hope disappointment; yet though darker elements are up-growing to cloud the light, and there is a night coming to the young fresh day, there is, amidst the blackness spreading around, a new and stranger kind of beauty, for in the dark firmament the stars are shining.

Shining, till in the age of Doubt, of Unbelief, they fall from the heavens, and there is blackness all around, darkness indescribable, utter and complete. Darkness like to the horror of that Egyptian night whose darkness might be felt.

O light! O light! art thou for ever quenched? Light, blessed light! shall we henceforward walk in blindness?

A pause—a hush—the stillness of death. Shall man lie down conquered by despair, and weary of wrestling? Up! for a fitful ray is glimmering on the obscured horizon. Up! for an angel wrestles with thee—wrestles with thy baser nature, and if thou strivest mightily thou shalt prevail. A new sun is rising, higher and higher, brighter and brighter, and the heavens and earth are bathed in a purer flood of glory. The shadows of the past have melted away, the age of Faith has come.

And this was what my musings brought me to. Yes, I can see that to every thoughtful "Me" in the world, in greater or in less degree, these phases must come. Woe unto those who are overcome in the age of Doubt!

This was the sermon I preached from the text of a few snow-flakes. I had not time to draw deductions or to apply it practically, for Doris coming in at that moment caused me to pause in my writing.

"At your diary, Joyce?" said she. "What of the story? Is Mr. Chester a hero yet?"

She knew the little book with its clasp and lock.

"I've been writing a sort of sermon, Doris."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, that at any rate you will show me now?" said she

"Not yet, Doris," I answered, "you must wait till the whirl of life has passed away, and we are in the age of Faith."

"Dreaming, dreaming still, Joyce; when will you wake up? You call me superstitious and romantic, but I believe I've more of real life about me than you have. Why should we not always be in an age of Faith, and believe that everything is happening for good around us, and taking pleasure and happiness as it comes in our way, and leave the future—" but here she broke off suddenly, as though some thought had struck her.

I did not answer, for though her words fell soothingly, they did not quite chime with my state of feeling. So we

left the diary and the age of Faith clasped up in it, and turned to every-day life again.

And I told her what Mr. Carmichael had said of the Gresford Lynns, and her eyes brightened, and she began to wonder how we could make an opportunity for seeing them. And then the thought that had struck her at the end of her former speech seemed to occur to her again, for with an energy that startled me, she said,

“Joyce—” and again she stopped.

“Well?”

„Joyce, I think you’ve a good deal of mesmerism in you. I don’t know what to call it, but I think you’ve some sort of belief in the supernatural, in the connection of the spiritual and the natural.”

It was such a vague, rambling, half-expressed speech, that I could not help smiling.

“Don’t laugh, Joyce. I’m quite in earnest. I’ve had a dream.”

“And you want an interpreter?”

“Not quite. I can’t tell it, it is misty and incomplete, and I should not give you the right impression; and, besides, it is so foolish to tell dreams. I only want you to tell me, do you believe in dreams?”

“In what way?”

“Do you think they are as dreams were in former times, foretelling what is going to happen?”

“You have been dreaming of some trouble in the future?”

"Yes, a foreshadowing."

"Something perhaps has been hinted at, and has dwelt upon your mind?"

"Joyce, Joyce, what does Mr. Carmichael mean? I would not for worlds and worlds do harm to the Gresford Lynns."

I tried to soothe her, to tell her that Mr. Carmichael seemed to be softening in his feelings towards them, that the remark he made might have been but an ebullition of anger, that something might have provoked him, that he was incomprehensible, that I could no more read him than I could a foreign language to which I had no key.

But this was not consolatory. She was impressed with the sense of some coming sorrow, and I could not comfort her. All I could do was to promise her that whatever befell she might be assured that I would help her to the utmost of my power. For her own sake and for the sake of the promise I had made.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAN THE SEA GIVE UP ITS DEAD?

SNOW-FLAKES do not fall for ever. Some time or other busy Mother Carey must take a little rest, and then the sun peeps out again, for he has been hidden by the showers of feathers that have been falling from the clouds. But though he shines brightly, his rays have not very much power, for a hard frost has set in, and the white dazzling snow lies on the ground undisturbed.

Doris was restless and uneasy; she could not shake off the impression that her dream had left upon her mind. In vain she tried to laugh off her feelings as absurd. How could one so well disposed to the Lynn children as she was, be likely to do them any injury? She felt, if she could only meet the Gresford Lynns face to face once more, that the feeling would pass away. So she hailed the bright frosty day as a means of bringing about the opportunity of seeing them.

Aunt Lotty's ideas were flowing in a similar channel.

"I should think, Joyce, that the little Lynns would be sure to go to see the river now it is frozen over. I think,

after what Mr. Carmichael said, that it would be well to take some notice of those children. I should like to speak to them myself, but Mr. Carmichael would not approve of that at present."

And Aunt Lotty gave a little sigh, and felt something as near envy at the superior good fortune of Joyce and Doris as it was in her gentle nature to do.

So Joyce and Doris wandered down to the river, and shaped their course along its windings even as far as the boundary of Lynncourt.

And there they heard children's voices, and saw Mr. Lynn and his two boys coming towards them.

Mr. Lynn was very pale, and he looked more thoughtful than usual, though at all times he had a grave, serious expression. Still he looked graver than ever now, and the sweet smile seldom played upon his features.

And to-day his thoughts had been straying far away into the past, and had called up old times and painful memories. The late death had brought back another death to his remembrance; and yet "brought back" scarcely conveys the impression, since that other death was ever present, and had tinctured his life and cankered his joys, and had so blended all other objects with its memory, that each event seemed in some inexplicable way connected with it. Therefore the late death had renewed the former one, and had brought back his first grief in all its intensity.

And now it stood out in all its horror before him,—a

death he had not seen—a death no hand had soothed—a death where wild waves had swept over a stately vessel, and a fair-faced corpse, with a little babe in its arms, had found a grave deep down beneath the raging waters.

Drowned!—drowned!

The cry had sounded in his ears for many and many a year, and to-day it sounded clearer than ever; and his imagination pictured the dismantled ship tossed helplessly upon the surging sea, whilst high above the roaring of the waves rose the despairing shriek of frantic human beings crying for “Help!—help!”

And no help came.

No help! The fair-faced woman, clasping the little child to her breast, gurgled in her death-agony for help! But no help came.

The cruel waters roared, and heaved, and foamed; the ship went down, and there was no trace left of her. The billows rolled unrestingly over the fatal spot, and hid the watery sepulchre for ever. The storm howled a requiem over the souls that had gone to their last account, and then, sobbing and sighing over its own wild passion, fell asleep, and the sun shone out.

It was over eighteen years ago.

Oh, that *she* had never set sail in that vessel! Oh, that *she* had waited yet a little longer!

Drowned!—drowned!

Would he never be deaf to that cry? It mingled with

every other sound he heard, and even now was mingling with merry childish voices calling on him amidst their play.

He was recalled from his vision by the children, who, tired of heaping up the soft white snow, besought their father to take them down to see the frozen river.

"The snow lies too deep in the fields," said Mr. Lynn.

"But Robert has swept a path for us," pleaded the elder boy.

And so they went.

And so they met with Joyce and Doris.

But now that the opportunity had come, Joyce and Doris felt loth to take advantage of it, for they recollected that this was the first time they had seen Mr. Lynn since his wife's death. They would have turned aside, but Mr. Lynn had seen them, and was advancing towards them. There was evidently no recollection of the fact upon his mind, or if there were, it did not strike him painfully. Possibly he was too much preoccupied in his musings for any fresh thought to affect him.

He spoke to them mechanically, and scarcely seemed to hear their answers.

After a little while Doris stole off with the children, but Joyce remained standing by his side; for, though he was silent now, when she had attempted to move away he had said to her,

"Miss Dormer, do not go; I wish to speak to you."

So Joyce waited; but still Mr. Lynn's speech was not forthcoming.

She stood wondering what Mr. Lynn wished to say, whether it was about Doris, or the children, or about Mrs. Lynn's death; but whatever it was, Mr. Lynn either was in no hurry, or else he did not know how to begin his subject.

In the meantime Doris and the children, warm with exercise and tired of making snowballs, had paused to rest.

Doris, seating herself on a log of wood, had taken the younger boy on her lap.

Suddenly he threw his arms around her. "I want my mamma," he said; "where is my mamma?"

"Hush, Ernie, hush! mamma is dead; she will never come again."

"But I want to see her," wailed the child; "O mamma! mamma!"

Doris turned to the elder boy. "Does Ernie grieve much?" she whispered.

"No," he replied; "only sometimes; and then if nurse shows him playthings or pictures he forgets."

"And do you forget, Archie?"

The boy shook his head sorrowfully. "No, never; and papa doesn't."

Doris wondered what she could do to divert the little one's thoughts.

"Here, Ernie," she said; "you shall have my watch to look at."

The child was all attention in a moment, but unfortunately Doris had left the watch at home.

"Is this a watch?" asked Ernie, touching the locket that hung round her neck.

"No," she replied; then, after a slight hesitation, she unfastened it. "Ernie, this is a picture of *my* mamma."

The child looked eagerly at it. "I have a picture of my mamma at home."

"Where is your mamma?" asked Archie, gently.

"I have no mamma now, Archie; she is dead, like yours."

"And your papa?"

"He is dead too, Archie."

"Then you have no one; I am sorry for you," said he.

The younger boy had jumped down, and was now hurrying towards his father with the locket in his hand.

Mr. Lynn was still deep in his reverie, and appeared to have forgotten that Joyce was standing near him, or that he had anything to say to her; and she was just on the point of slipping away and joining Doris, when the child came running up.

"Papa, papa, look; it is *her* mamma," and he pointed to Doris.

"Yes," answered Mr. Lynn, without noticing the locket that the boy held out.

"But, look, look," persisted the child, thrusting it into his father's hand.

Mr. Lynn, to satisfy him, looked down at the locket.

"Yes, Ernie, yes—" But, as his eye fell upon it, he started. Surely he had seen that locket somewhere before. Was he awake? what had happened? There seemed a mist before his eyes as he gazed upon it, and noted its old-fashioned shape and workmanship. He touched the spring, and the lid flew open, and disclosed the portrait of a fair-faced woman. With a loud cry, he sprang past the astonished child, and seizing Doris by the arm,

"Who are you?" he cried; "whose portrait is this?"

"My mother's."

"Ellen Carmichael? for heaven's sake, tell me, is it Ellen Carmichael?"— and he gazed at her wildly.

"My mother's name was Ellen," said Doris, half frightened at his vehemence.

"But, my Ellen! my Ellen! tell me, girl, was *my* Ellen your mother? Can the sea give up its dead? Girl! girl! what do you know of my Ellen?"

And then more calmly, still grasping Doris's hands, for fear that she might escape him, he asked—

"Who was your mother?"

"Ellen Carmichael."

"When did she die?"

"Six months ago."

"And your father?"

"He died in Australia."

Mr. Lynn groaned.

"O God! O God! can this be true?"

He turned to Joyce, whose ideas were gradually sorting themselves from the confusion into which they had lately been thrown; and though far from the truth, she saw at once that there was some mysterious connection between Mr. Lynn and the Carmichael family.

“Miss Dormer, can *you* tell me anything? Who is this girl? Is that her mother; or is this some cruel scheme of Hugh Carmichael’s?”

“I do not know, Mr. Lynn. What is it you wish to know? I believe this to be the portrait of Mr. Carmichael’s sister, who was supposed to be drowned at sea.”

Mr. Lynn staggered back, and but for the tree against which he had been leaning, would have fallen to the ground.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BROTHERS-IN-LAW.

TWO hours later Mr. Carmichael sat in his study awaiting a guest,—a guest whom, till within the last six months, he had never expected to see beneath the roof of Green Oake.

It is difficult to say what were Mr. Carmichael's exact feelings; now he rubbed his hands softly, and a gleam of triumph lighted up his eyes, and now an anxious expression would cross his brow, and his lips would become compressed.

Of what was he thinking?—Not of the years that had passed since he had left Australia, but of the time preceding them.

A quick ring at the door-bell.

Aunt Lotty, listening in the drawing-room, held her breath.

She knew it was Mr. Gresford Lynn coming to see Mr. Carmichael on important business, but she knew nothing further. A cloud of mist and dust hovered around her, and she saw nothing clearly.

Doris was half-kneeling at Aunt Lotty's feet, resting her

head on her lap. She was crying bitterly, though she scarce knew why; but a sense of impending trouble to the Lynn family, of which she was somehow the cause, pressed heavily upon her.

Joyce sat very still, trying to sew, but her brain was busier than her fingers, and the piece of work fell from her hands; so she leaned her head back, shut her eyes, and tried to piece together the thoughts and events of the last few weeks.

Somehow the servants knew that business of importance was going on,—servants always know everything; and there was an air of solemnity in the manner in which the man opened the door for Mr. Gresford Lynn, and ushered him into his master's study.

Mr. Carmichael rose, but he did not put out his hand, though he was not rubbing his hands now, they were folded behind him. He bowed stiffly to Mr. Lynn, and the two men gazed at each other as though each were suspicious of the other, and each unwilling to make the first move.

Mr. Carmichael, quiet and composed, yet with the nervous twitch ever and anon working at the corners of his mouth; Mr. Lynn, trembling with emotion, eager and yet too agitated to frame his questioning into audible words. Both were silent. Mr. Carmichael pointed his visitor to a seat. Mr. Lynn sat down and then rose up again, and leaned against the mantelpiece.

"You desire to ask for some information, Mr. Lynn?" said

Mr. Carmichael, and a gleam came into his eyes and passed away in a sneering smile upon his thin lips.

But Mr. Lynn did not see it, he was looking down upon the ground, his hands were clasped convulsively, and his lips were trying to frame a word, but no sound came. Again and again he endeavoured to command his voice, and at length with a mighty effort one word burst forth, so sharp and clear in its imploring tone that even Mr. Carmichael was startled.

“Ellen!”

It died away, and there was no answer. And again the anguished lips moved.

“My wife!”

Then came a response in a cold voice.

“Your wife?”

“My wife, my long-lost wife!” exclaimed Mr. Lynn. “If you have the heart of a man, tell me what of my wife?”

“*Your* wife, *my* sister, Ellen Carmichael?”

“My wife!”

“Sit down, Mr. Lynn,” said Mr. Carmichael, calmly; “we have a long business in hand.”

Mr. Lynn threw himself into the chair and leaned eagerly forward.

“I find,” began Mr. Carmichael, “by the parish register in the village of Hillfield, county——” here Mr. Carmichael was interrupted.

“What need——”

“Pardon me,” said Mr. Carmichael, “I am a business man, and must proceed in order. In this register I find that in the year 18—, just twenty years ago, the entry of the marriage of John Gresford and Ellen Carmichael. Why this marriage was kept secret at the time I am not able to say, perhaps you can inform me?”

“It was only to be for a time.”

Mr. Carmichael went on.

“The witness to this marriage was Henry Bargrave, and after the marriage you returned to Australia. My sister followed in the next vessel with Henry Bargrave and his wife, ostensibly as governess to a great niece of Mrs. Bargrave’s. Am I right?”

Mr. Lynn bowed.

“I had quarrelled with my sister, and had determined never to speak to her again, therefore her movements were nothing to me, and it is not surprising that I was not made acquainted with them. She was free to go where she pleased, and I did not know that she had left England, until I saw in a paper an account of the loss of the “Albatross.” It was stated that, with the exception of a few of the crew saved in the long-boat, all on board had perished. Amongst the names in the list of passengers I read that of Ellen Carmichael. Of your death, or rather your supposed death, I should say, I had heard previously, and then I left Australia, and until lately have had no communication with any one there.”

Mr. Lynn had been sitting compelling himself to listen until Mr. Carmichael had finished speaking. Now he said in a subdued voice,

“And you never knew that your sister was my wife?”

“Never until six months ago.”

Mr. Lynn started to his feet.

“And how, how did you know then?”

“My sister told me on her death-bed. Ellen Carmichael did not perish at sea.”

“Oh God! not drowned! not drowned! but living through those long, long years!”

Mr. Lynn clutched Mr. Carmichael by the shoulder, fiercely he looked into his face, fixedly, as though he would read his inmost soul.

“Hugh Carmichael, is this true?”

“As I live, it is true.”

Mr. Lynn dropped into his chair and closed his eyes.

“Go on,” he groaned; “in mercy, go on, and tell me all there is to hear.”

“Your wife and child were saved. They had been put into a boat with some other passengers by the captain, and were picked up by a Spanish vessel, bound for Lisbon, where they were landed, and from thence made their way to England. My sister did not go up into the north to the old place, but found a home in the south, where she lived, and where she died.”

“How long have you known that she was living?”

“Seven years; but never of her marriage until on her death-bed she disclosed the secret. It could do no harm then, she said.”

“And I was never told.”

“Why should you be? You came here a rich man, with a beautiful wife and children, and what matter was it to you that the sister of the man you scorned, and who was thought to be drowned eighteen years ago, was getting her living by lace-making in an obscure village in Devonshire?”

“I never scorned you, Hugh Carmichael,” said Mr. Lynn, sadly; “and if you had ever any ground for believing so, you are amply revenged to-day.”

Yes, Mr. Carmichael was revenged; he felt it; he had triumphed over the man whom he had hated all his life. In that point of view he was certainly tasting of the sweets of revenge. Yet bitter, so bitter, that the sweet would not sweeten it, came the thought that he had been more sinning than sinned against. Ah! if people could only believe it, it is much better to be the injured party. If the wound be sharp and severe at first, it leaves no fretting sore behind. Time, the great healer, comes and fans it with his wing and soothes the irritation, pouring in balm and oil till all is well again. It is easier, far easier and happier, to forgive than to need forgiveness.

Of course, these thoughts found no place in Mr. Carmichael's speculations. True, he had a vague idea that he

should be glad to find some instance wherein he, and not Mr. Lynn, had been the injured person; but memory signally failed him in this respect. Wherefore he had to content himself with gloating over his present triumph, such as it was.

"You saw my wife on her death-bed, Hugh Carmichael," said Mr. Lynn, in a low, agitated voice.

"Yes."

"Did she leave no message, no remembrance?"

"None. She knew of your marriage—of your children; and she begged me to take care of Doris."

"No message—not one word?"

"None."

Again Mr. Lynn groaned.

"It is a satisfaction to me that my sister, though dead, can yet be righted by the justice you can do her child. Will you do this justice?"

Mr. Lynn looked wonderingly at Mr. Carmichael, as though he did not see the drift of his speech.

"Will you do justice to her child?" repeated Mr. Carmichael.

"Her child! *My* child! Good heavens! what do you take me for? My child; my Ellen's child; what should I not do for her? Where is she? Let me have my child!"

"Your eldest child, remember," said Mr. Carmichael, emphatically; "I claim the estate of Lynncourt for my niece Doris Gresford."

But Mr. Lynn heeded not his words; there was but one thought in his heart, his new-found daughter.

Strange that his heart should have so yearned towards her, surely some mysterious influence had been at work drawing them together, bringing the daughter of his first wife to watch by the last wife's deathbed. Strange that they both should have clung to her in their last solemn hours, as though the one had sent a messenger of peace to hush the other to her wakeless sleep, that so in death they might be linked together, and leave a daughter overshadowed by their love, a precious treasure for him to love for their united sakes. O Doris! Doris!

"Take me to Doris," he said.

And Mr. Carmichael led the way to the drawing-room, where Doris still sat leaning her head upon Aunt Lotty's lap. She had left off crying, but her eyes were heavy and swollen.

As Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael entered the room she sprang up.

"What is it?" she asked, for in the faces of the two men she read that some strange revelation was at hand.

"Your mother was supposed to have been drowned at sea," said Mr. Carmichael.

"Doris, my daughter! Ellen Carmichael was my wife."

But Doris did not speak, she gave one wild cry and fell senseless into Mr. Lynn's arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM JOYCE DORMER'S DIARY.

AND this is what my story has arrived at. Who would have expected such an issue? It is scarcely like real life,—more like a romance; yet is not life a romance? Nevertheless, this seems to me an exaggeration. Should I in my wildest speculations have ever dreamed that Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael could be brothers-in-law, and that Doris was Mr. Lynn's daughter?

I cannot make out life; it is past understanding,—a jumble of curious chapters written down in the book of destiny that man must spell out letter by letter for himself, and make sense of as he goes along. Chapters with wild weird sentences in them, incomprehensible almost, as we stammer through them, but fitting deftly in when the final chapter comes. Oh! never without that "Finis" can the book be properly read.

Or is it not so definitively arranged? Is it not, rather, a succession of loose sheets thrown into a giant printing-press, which men crowd round, struggling for the impressions as they come to hand; each seizing and making his own that which is nearest to him, longing for that beyond his grasp,

and blotting and blurring that which he possesses in his mad efforts to reach the unattainable?

Or, again, may there not be blank books in which he may write down for himself, and create as he goes along the story of his life?

How is it?

I pause and think, and then I see Doris tossed like a spray of sea-weed on the mighty ocean, severed from the parent root, and lost for many a day; yet drawn by strange affinities, still floating along in safe waters, and reuniting with the parent branch.

I cannot understand. What use, if we so drift along, to raise a hand to steer our course? If life is so prepared,—if it is so marked out, so pencilled that we have nothing more to do than just fill up the sketch, why toil?—why struggle? The sketch; ay, is that it? the outline? Stay, what is a picture till the lights and shades come in? Work on—toil on, life-painter; do thy painting with a masterly hand. An infinitesimal number of fine strokes, of broad shadows, of patient touches, are needful to bring the picture to perfection; and this is thy work: the sketch alone is traced out for thee; the working-out is all thy own; the finished picture thy free work; can I so understand it? Ah, no; this is but my own explanation of a problem that cannot be solved.

Of this only am I satisfied, that there is nothing too wild, too wonderful, too incredible to happen. Yet are we un-

believers, and with the Wonder age increases the age of Incredulity.

Take the world as it is, with all its marvels, and does one find that faith is on the increase? Nay, faith has rather run into machinery—into mere mechanism, carrying out the practical, until the world runs upon its world-made wheels and faith is over-ridden. Yet is faith needful more and more, since only by faith the light shall come. O, weary, weary world, what dark clouds hover over thee!

So I, Joyce Dormer, write, having fallen into a reverie, and seeing all things as bits of jagged glass and odds and ends in a kaleidoscope, from a heterogeneous heap framing themselves into shapely patterns.

Mr. Lynn, Mr. Withers, Mr. Carmichael, Doris, have all leaped up into their respective niches; and the up-building of my story, strange as it seemed at first to me, is growing more satisfactory.

It is not so with Doris; the effect the revelation has had upon her perplexes me. She is distressed beyond measure, and completely unstrung. After she recovered from her fainting fit, she seemed stupified, and has been lying in a state of lethargy all day.

She roused herself up this afternoon, and we talked the matter over.

“Joyce,” she said, “do you believe in Uncle Carmichael?”

I had many times told her I did not; but I repeated it, as it seemed to afford her satisfaction.

"I believe him to be capable of doing anything to accomplish his own ends," she said.

"But, Doris," I answered, "in this case I do not see what end he has to accomplish. It is natural he should wish his sister's marriage to be acknowledged, and her child to have a share of her father's love."

"But I had never missed it—never wanted it; why could not he let the past lie buried in the grave; why need he raise the stone, and let the dead past come back to life! It would have been happier, far happier for Mr. Lynn to have believed my mother drowned long long ago, than to know that she has lived and yet been dead to him; to have been comparatively near, and yet so far off. Joyce, it must be torture!—madness to him to think of it. How he must hate Uncle Carmichael! One word from him would have brought them together for one last look; they would have spoken once more to each other before her lips were sealed for ever."

"But Mr. Carmichael did not know till she was on her death-bed that his sister was Mr. Lynn's wife. Doris, I believe that everything is ordered wisely. Look back and answer, would it have been for his happiness to have known it then?"

Doris hid her face.

"O, Joyce, I am so glad that Mrs. Lynn is dead."

So was I, though the thought had not struck me before.

"I shall never be happy again," moaned Doris. "Why was I born to bring so much misery upon those I would not harm?"

"Misery, Doris!" I exclaimed, "happiness. You did not see Mr. Lynn as I did, or you would have no fears. Think what it will be to him to have a daughter who can soothe his heart, and tell him all he so much longs to know of the life of her who has never left his thoughts throughout his lifetime—a daughter who has closed the eyes of the two dearest on earth to him. Doris, there is happiness, there is peace for you."

But Doris was not comforted.

"And this is what Uncle Carmichael has been hinting at," sobbed she; "I am the eldest child and shall rob poor Archie of his fortune; it is tied down upon the eldest child, my uncle says. My dream has come to pass. Joyce, Joyce, you said you would be my friend in time of need, what shall I do?"

I told her that she needlessly fretted herself, that Mr. Lynn would hold her guiltless of inflicting any injury; that he would willingly give up the property to her.

"But Archie, Archie, I will never touch a shilling of that property, it shall all be his. Why did I ever come to Green Oake? O mother, mother! would that I were lying in the grave beside you. Little did you think of the sorrow your child would work when you had gone."

Doris is very strange, she has no desire to see Mr. Lynn; she says she is not well enough, that she must have time to think, to believe in what has happened. She will not believe it until Mr. Carmichael proves it by documents. What fancy has she got into her head? As if there were anything to doubt!

Mr. Carmichael goes softly about the house rubbing his hands gently, and drawing his mouth into an imitation of a benevolent smile. He congratulates himself upon his niece being heiress to so excellent a property as Lynncourt. And he remarks to Aunt Lotty that he has been agreeably disappointed in Mr. Gresford Lynn.

Aunt Lotty is very glad to hear it, for now there will be no objection to the little Lynns coming to Green Oake.

And Mr. Carmichael replies that there will be none at all, since they are Doris's step-brothers.

Which is a new source of bewilderment to Aunt Lotty, whose ideas have not yet recovered the confusion into which they have been thrown. Nevertheless she indulges in pleasant day-dreams. She has not yet had time to grapple with the subject. I have explained it to her as clearly as I can; still she is not quite at home in all its branches.

"Joyce," she said, after she had been musing for some minutes, "I wonder what Mr. Chester will think of this."

I had not had time to think of Mr. Chester; indeed, I was hoping that I was forgetting him, but Aunt Lotty's words brought me back to a truer knowledge of myself, and a little

twinge of—jealousy?—no, I will not call it that, for I am sure that that is not the right name to give it, nevertheless there is a little feeling that I cannot quite define, that will sometimes come into my heart in spite of myself, but which I am determined to conquer. Begone, evil spirit, for jealousy has no place in a true heart.

Thus I exorcised the demon for awhile, and listened to Aunt Lotty.

She hoped that Mr. Lynn would have no objection to Mr. Chester, she was sure he could not have any. And then there would be a wedding after all, only it would not be at Green Oake. Still she should have a great deal to do with it, as Doris had no mother. And then she added, with a look of great relief, "No doubt Mr. Lynn has plenty of friends and relations, so there will be no difficulty about bridesmaids, and that, you know, Joyce, was always the great difficulty."

Ah! Aunt Lotty, you've had a smooth and easy life, if it has been rather a dull one, so you don't know much about difficulties. But in this case I could not help acknowledging that there could be no difficulties at all.

"I think," I suggested, "that Mr. Lynn will like Mr. Chester much better than Mr. Carmichael does."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Joyce; not that I think Mr. Carmichael disliked Mr. Chester; he was very kind and polite to him, and took a great deal of trouble in talking to him; but you see he knew all about this wonderful matter,

that we knew nothing of; so he would not have liked to encourage anything of which Mr. Lynn might not approve. I see it all now,—Mr. Carmichael is so very sensible. It is so delightful to have some one sensible to rely upon.”

And Aunt Lotty again lulled herself into the belief that she had been a most fortunate woman in her choice.

As long as a woman firmly believes in a creed of this sort, whatever her husband may be, she is not to be pitied. To her he is still her ideal, and lives in her eyes invested with the qualities that she has lavishly bestowed upon him. It is not until she comes to wake from this dream, and the ideal passes into rude reality, that we need waste our compassion upon her. Aunt Lotty's waking time had not yet arrived; perhaps it might never come. Happily might she slumber on to the end.

I went back to Doris, and found her lying on the bed sleeping peacefully. Her dark hair was all loose, and her face looked worn and weary. She was too much exhausted to be dreaming now, but had fallen into a heavy sleep. So I moved quietly from the bedside, and went into the little porch-room again.

I drew my chair close up to the fire, and there I sat looking at pictures in the glowing embers. I did not light a candle, though the dusk was creeping on. It was pleasant to sit in the firelight and be still for awhile after the agitation into which we had been thrown. There was something very luxurious in the feeling that stole over me, and I could

almost have wished that the moment might be prolonged into eternity, so full of rest and peace it seemed. I looked not back into the past; neither forward into the future; the present, as an angel, with outstretched wings, had overshadowed me, and I was borne into the regions of blessedness.

I had been sitting thus for half an hour, or more, when Doris touched me on the shoulder. She had stolen so softly into the room that I had not heard her.

"Have you a candle, Joyce?"

"Yes."

"Light it, and give it me."

I lighted it.

"What is the matter, Doris?" I asked; for looking in her face I perceived that some new idea was working in her mind.

"My mother's packet."

"Well?"

"I might open it if I ever needed assistance," said she; "and heaven knows I need it now."

She took the candle, and in a moment I heard her unlock the box. Then she returned with the packet in her hand.

She sat down by me, and turned it over and over, now examining the seal; now gazing at the superscription. She could not quite make up her mind to open it.

"Joyce, if ever I wanted assistance I want it now. You don't know what I feel. You think that everything is clear; that a smooth path is before me; but I can't get rid of

presentiments. Perhaps I am foolish, but this has come so suddenly; it is so incredible that I want more proof than Uncle Carmichael has given me. It seems to me that the voice of my mother alone can ease my doubts and fears. Perhaps she looked forward to this crisis, and I shall find in this packet words to guide me. Do you think the time has come to open it?"

"I do," I answered.

"Will you open it?" she asked, holding out the packet towards me.

"No, Doris; that is for you to do."

Her hand trembled and her eyes filled with tears as she examined it once more.

"Give me a pair of scissors, Joyce; I cannot break *her* seal."

Tenderly she cut round its edges—then she waited again—then she turned back one fold of paper, then another; it was but the envelope to another packet.

Doris lifted it up—there was writing upon it also.

She read it, and I read it; and the words we read were these —

"To be given to John Gresford Lynn, of Lynncourt."

CHAPTER XXII.

DORIS STARTS ON A JOURNEY.

DORIS lay long awake that night. Her poor little brain was bewildered, stunned, and she could not clear it of its confusion. In vain she pressed her hand to her forehead to smooth away the troubled thoughts. She lay still for a few seconds, trying to bring back quietness to her agitated mind. But it was useless; even when she had driven the fierce waters back, they rose again higher than before, and poured their seething tide in an overwhelming torrent over her soul.

She tried to analyse her feelings, but she scarce could comprehend them. All that she could make out was a desire to be away, a vague presentiment that she had no right to be where she was, and above all an ever increasing distrust of Mr. Carmichael.

The old contented days in the poor lodgings came to her remembrance, and she saw her mother moving gently about and making of that humble abode a blessed place, wherein a guardian angel dwelt and tended her.

That poor mother! How she had suffered and suffered

patiently! With the writing upon the packet a new light had dawned upon her.

Clearly as if a voice from the dead had told it to her, she understood now the last seven years of her mother's life. She understood now why she had prized next to her Bible, the laureate's poem.

One dreary night in November it had been lent to them.

"It will be something for us to read together," Doris had said.

And her mother, taking the book from her hand, read on the title-page, "Enoch Arden."

"I wonder what it is about; one cannot fancy anything very poetical from the name," said Doris. "Enoch, Enoch, I don't think those old scriptural names sound well in poetry."

"Enoch," repeated her mother, softly, and her mind reverted to the one Enoch whose life is given in a single verse.

"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him."

What more sublime biography could be written? What nobler epitaph?

"God took him," she said, half aloud.

The wind was howling round the cottage, and the rain beat against the window. The two drew close together, and by the dim candle-light began the story, the wind sighing a wild accompaniment to the mother's voice.

And they read how Enoch Arden left his wife and little ones and went to sea.

Oh, the sea, the deceitful, treacherous sea! And they read on. He came not back: year after year rolled on—he came not back; and then *she* married—the wife married; and Enoch Arden——Oh, cruel sea!

How her mother shuddered, deep gasping sobs came, and the tears rolled down. How scared and white she looked!

“Put down the book, O mother, mother, do not read!”

But as though fascinated by some irresistible power, her mother still went on. Late, late into the night. It was midnight, and Doris was weary.

“Go to bed, my child, you can finish it to-morrow.”

And so she went, and no mortal eye saw the end of that midnight reading. O God, O God! what agony poor human souls wrestle through, to which Thou alone art witness! O Lord have mercy upon us!

In the morning, when Doris awoke, her mother was kneeling by the bedside praying. She was dressed, and Doris thought that she had risen earlier than usual. She knew otherwise now; she knew that through that night her mother's eyes had never closed, her mother's lips had never ceased to pray, “Thy will be done.” She knew now why her mother had treasured up that book, and said it was worthy of a golden binding set with precious stones.

And knowing now that mother's secret, could she live

among these people? Was it not like crowning with thorns her mother's memory?

Yet Mr. Lynn was guiltless. True; but she could not see him again, neither would she claim her birthright. She had battled with poverty all her life until now; she could do so again. She was young and strong, and she feared not. Quieter now—quieter, for a plan had traced itself out before her. She had as strong a will as her Uncle Carmichael; she was as brave as he was; he should not conquer.

And then she fell asleep, and Joyce bending over her in the morning, heard a calm voice say—

“I am better.”

“You will be quite well by the time Mr. Lynn returns.”

“Where is he?”

“He had to go to London last night.”

Doris started.

“When will he be at home again?”

“To-morrow.”

There are moments in which, with a sudden flash, a whole lifetime will come before one, in which we read causes for the effects we wondered at—excuses for the evil we saw perpetrated; answers to the questions we thought never to have been satisfied about; and the past seems to have made a complete period—a finished chapter, to which there is no addition necessary—a drama, which needs no epilogue. There must be a new story commenced, a new plot invented; what has gone before cannot be carried on into the

future, and there is a distinct barrier raised that separates the past from all that shall happen hereafter.

It is not, perhaps, the experience of every one of us, but it is of many.

It was the experience of Doris at this present moment.

The life that had been hers until now seemed to have come to a full stop. She had read to the end of the chapter, and had closed the book. It was a relief to her, the tale was finished; a new story must succeed, and the outline faintly shadowed in the night gained breadth and sharpness, and did not vanish away with morning light as most night visions do. It arranged itself in her mind, and worked itself out with detailed comprehensiveness.

Aunt Lotty's eyes were gladdened by the sight of Doris looking, if pale, yet contented and almost cheerful.

She wondered she had ever been otherwise.

"A father and two dear little brothers," she said to Joyce, "I cannot understand it."

But poor Aunt Lotty never could understand anything that was not quite simple and on the surface.

Mr. Carmichael, greeting his niece, met her eyes steadily and searchingly looking into his, and his own for a moment fell beneath the steady gaze. But only for a moment; he rallied instantly, and being in good spirits that morning, addressed Doris as Miss Gresford Lynn, and alluded to the fortune of which she would shortly be the possessor.

"My niece the heiress," he said.

Whereat Doris could have sprung from her seat, and rushed away weeping; but her resolve being taken, she sat still and firmly compressed her lips.

Then Mr. Carmichael's voice assumed a saddened tone, and he said, softly—

“Would that my poor sister had lived to see this day.”

The expression of which natural and amiable sentiment had almost upset Doris's equanimity, but by a strong effort she restrained herself.

“I am going to take a long walk, Joyce,” she said, when they were alone again.

“Shall I go with you?”

“No.”

“You are not well yet, Doris,” she answered, looking anxiously at her; “there is something not right.”

“I am a little feverish; this walk will do me good.”

And Doris laughed—a strange, hollow laugh that smote upon Joyce's ear.

“I'm not accustomed to being an heiress yet,” continued she, “or to being Miss Gresford Lynn, of Lynncourt. How does it sound, natural or not?”

“Not natural at present, certainly. But why should you take it so much to heart? Your mother must have looked forward to this, or wherefore did she give you the packet?”

There was something in Joyce's argument; yet, strange to say, instead of wavering in her determination, she was only the more firmly resolved to carry it into execution.

“My mother was unselfish,” she replied; “but Joyce,” she added, then she stopped; a new thought arose, “stay; where is the packet? He need not have it now; I am not in want of assistance. Perhaps this is not the time to give it. I will keep it a little longer.”

“I left it on the table last night,” replied Joyce, “with some other papers,” and she lifted up several papers that were lying there, thinking to find it underneath.

But it was gone.

They searched everywhere.

It was nowhere to be found.

“Uncle Carmichael has it,” said Doris, intuitively, the blood springing into her face.

“What right has he—? It’s stealing! Joyce, I *will* tell him so! Let me go.”

For Joyce had laid her hand imploringly upon her arm.

For a moment Doris was inclined to be angry with Joyce, also; then she turned and kissed her three or four times.

“Leave me,” she said.

And when Joyce was gone, she hastily made up a few clothes into a small bundle, opened her desk, and took from thence the money of which she was possessed, collected the few articles of jewellery that she owned, and put on her cloak and hat.

She sat down after this, for she was trembling violently.

Then recovering herself, she concealed the bundle under her cloak, and slipped downstairs. At the foot she met Aunt Lotty.

"I am going for a long walk, Aunt Lotty."

"I am glad to hear it, dear, it will do you all the good in the world." And Aunt Lotty kissed her affectionately.

So Doris went through the garden and into the road. She felt dizzy at first and her steps faltered. She felt as one who is pursued in a dream, as though she could not place one foot before the other, and that she was trying in vain to flee. Before long the fresh air revived her, her courage rose, and with her courage her strength, and with her strength came all her indignant feeling against Mr. Carmichael, and nerved her for what she was undertaking.

She had gone without attempting to recover the packet; second thoughts had shown to her the uselessness of it, and also that it might interfere with her present design.

She walked on rapidly over the fields and through narrow lanes, leaving the high-road, and panting along like a frightened hare.

Whither?

She made her way to the nearest railway station, about three miles from Green Oake. It was a small station, with a poor waiting-room, in which there was no fire. Doris thankfully crept into it, hoping to be unnoticed. The station-master did not know her by sight, and she trusted

that she might, at the last moment, take her ticket unobserved.

The train could not be long before it came up. At last the whistle was heard, she hurried out and took a second-class ticket for London; and, without having attracted any attention, got into a carriage, the door of which happened to be open.

The signal was given—puff, puff went the engine, and now for the first time she breathed freely. She should have changed trains before she could well be missed, and all trace of her flight would, she hoped, be lost. And the train sped on; several stations were passed, still it seemed to her as though they were crawling. On—on! quicker—quicker! A snow-storm was threatening; down came the snow, a few flakes at first, then faster and faster.

Aunt Lotty, looking out of the drawing-room window, hoped Doris was sheltering somewhere.

“Oh yes,” returned Joyce, “of course she is; I dare say she’s at Letty Jones’s.”

“Don’t say so before Mr. Carmichael, dear,” responded Aunt Lotty, in a frightened tone. “I don’t know that he would be angry, but still it is well to be on the safe side, and I’ve been careful not to mention Letty Jones’s name since that night. You remember, Joyce?”

Yes, Joyce did remember.

“You think she is sure to be quite safe?” asked Aunt Lotty, after a pause.

“Oh, yes, she would be sure to shelter; she will stay somewhere until it is over.”

“But it does not seem likely to be over,” said Aunt Lotty, as the sky grew darker and darker.

“Not yet,” returned Joyce, rising and watching the myriad atoms chasing each other to the ground, “but it is too heavy to last long. We must wait.”

And so they waited.

It was more than an hour before the storm began to abate. Such a fall of snow had not been known for years.

It came down with less violence now, but it came steadily, and heaped up a thick covering over the earth.

“It is leaving off, I think,” said Joyce.

It was leaving off; but as the darkness caused by the falling snow was dispelled, another darkness came creeping on; the days were short, and twilight was setting in.

Aunt Lotty grew fidgety.

“I think I will send Empson with an umbrella and cloak to Letty Jones’s.”

In the meantime the train had laboured through the snow-storm, and had left it miles behind. There was one station to be passed, and then Doris would be in London; then she should be safe from pursuit.

She alighted with the crowd of second-class passengers, of whom the porters took no notice; they were too much alive to their own interest to heed the shabby-looking people

who would not be likely to give them a sixpence or shilling for doing their duty; for though attention to passengers without a fee may be the work of a railway porter, attention to passengers with a fee is duty and profit also, therefore when the two are in juxtaposition, both being duty alike, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the porter should choose the favourable combination of circumstances in preference to a duty that is simply virtue unrewarded.

Doris having no luggage, had no occasion for the services of these officials, and was advancing to engage a cab.

All at once she shrank back, and drew her veil more tightly over her face; for on the platform within a few yards of her, stood Mr. Gresford Lynn.

Fortunately he was not looking in her direction, so she retreated, and instead of carrying out her intention, hurried through the maze of cabs and carriages, and passed quickly out of the gates into the street.

There she stood still,—she was alone in London, not knowing her way, and the afternoon was sufficiently dusk for the lamps to be lighted, so that to all intents and purposes night had already begun. The snow-storm had not been so heavy as in the country, still there were traces of it, and the streets were wet and slippery. She was confused and bewildered with the mighty hum of the giant city.

Necessity, however, impelled her to act; she must get on as speedily as possible to the Shoreditch station. She would not inquire from a policeman her way lest it might lead to

her being traced in case inquiries were set on foot, and she was certain that every effort would be made to find out whither she had fled. So she followed the stream of people, taking care to keep in streets that were thronged and well lighted, until at length she came to a cab-stand.

There she took a cab.

"Where to?" asked the cabman.

"To the Shoreditch station."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"LUCY GRAY."

EMPSON returned with tidings that Miss Carmichael was not at Letty Jones's, neither had she been there. That the snow was deep over the fields and moor that it was as much as one could do to find one's way; also that in many places, owing to the strong wind, it had drifted considerably. Aunt Lotty looked at Joyce in blank horror.

"It's been on my mind all the afternoon," said she; "I can't get 'Lucy Gray' out of my head."

Joyce looked at her wonderingly.

Now, Aunt Lotty's poetical *repertoire* was limited, and amongst its scanty treasures "Lucy Gray" and "The Battle of Blenheim" had been to her the representative pieces of their respective authors. They had struck upon her fancy when she had first read them, and had remained with her ever since; and on a snowy day, or on the occasion of war or rumour of war, she was apt to recur to one or other of her favourites.

And, in answer to Joyce's wondering look, she replied,

"The child who was lost on the moor, my dear. Oh! I hope Doris is safe. Where is Mr. Carmichael?"

And other fears being forgotten in the one great fear that was oppressing her, she went straight to Mr. Carmichael's study, and walked in, followed by Joyce.

Mr. Carmichael looked up astonished at the invasion.

"Doris!" murmured Aunt Lotty, in a voice that hovered between fear and desperation. "Doris is out in the snow, we don't know where."

"I presume she will be in by dinner-time," replied Mr. Carmichael, calmly.

"But she isn't at Letty Jones's. She's not been near there; I sent Empson, and they've seen nothing of her."

"Very discreet of her not to go to Letty Jones's after what I said, and very indiscreet of you to suppose that she would go, and to send Empson after her. There is no occasion to distress yourself. Doris has sense enough to take care of herself."

"But she's been out ever since twelve o'clock," suggested Joyce; "and now it is almost four."

But Mr. Carmichael expressed no sympathy with her fears. Doris was not like a girl unaccustomed to hardships or rough weather; he felt no concern as to her safety. Doubtless she would be in by dinner-time. She was sheltering in some cottage, and some cottager would bring her home if there were any danger. "Or, perhaps," he added, with a sneer, "Miss Gresford Lynn has found her way to Lynncourt to see her two little brothers."

There was a ray of comfort in the suggestion, despite

Joyce's doubts as to its probability. Certainly there was no knowing how it might have been; the storm might have overtaken her close to Lynncourt; Mr. Lynn was away, and she knew how fond Doris was of the children.

She tried to hope that it might be as Mr. Carmichael had said, and she went on hoping and hoping.

Aunt Lotty was much consoled by the new idea; it was so likely, so natural, and she blamed herself for her stupidity in not having thought of it, and wondered how she could have been so inconsiderate as to disturb Mr. Carmichael.

"You see, dear," she remarked, how he thinks of everything. My heart is quite lightened, and 'Lucy Gray' has gone entirely out of my head."

But Aunt Lotty's cheerfulness did not extend itself to Joyce, who could not divest herself of a presentiment that there was something wrong.

Five o'clock struck, and she went to dress for dinner. Half-past five—six. The dinner-bell rang. Still no Doris.

Mr. Carmichael was imperturbable. He would not allow that there was the slightest cause for feeling alarmed. He knew exactly how everything had happened.

"I wish I did," mused Aunt Lotty; but she did not dare to give utterance to the thought. Joyce grew more and more uneasy, and Aunt Lotty's uncomfortable fears began to steal over her again, so that by the time dinner was over, "Lucy Gray" was again paramount in her mind.

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"Could not Empson be sent to Lynncourt to inquire if Doris is there?" Joyce ventured to ask.

"No."

"But she may not be there?"

"I have expressed an opinion that she *is* there," returned Mr. Carmichael, very decidedly.

So Joyce made no further reply. Yet every minute she grew more anxious; she could not tell why, but she felt convinced that Doris was not at Lynncourt.

"Aunt Lotty," she said, when they were again in the drawing-room, "I am quite sure Doris is not at Lynncourt, I am certain that something has happened; Doris would have sent word. Do send some one to see?"

"My dear, I dare not; besides, Mr. Carmichael is certain that she is there, and he is always right, you know. I think he is never mistaken," said Aunt Lotty, dubiously, as though she were reasoning with herself, and endeavouring to establish Mr. Carmichael's infallibility. But her arguments were apparently not altogether successful, for she concluded her speech with, "Nevertheless, Joyce, I'm as frightened as you are."

"If Mr. Carmichael will not let Empson go I must go myself," answered Joyce, "for I cannot stand this suspense any longer."

But at that instant Mr. Carmichael appeared.

"I hear that Mr. Lynn returns this evening," he said, "and I wish to put into his hands a packet addressed to

him in my sister's handwriting. I found it on the table in the porchroom. Doris ought to have given it to me long since; as it is doubtless a document of some importance, I ought to have been made acquainted with its existence."

Although her fears had well nigh driven every other thought from her mind, Joyce could not help remembering the lost seal. Mr. Carmichael continued, "It was very careless of Doris to leave it about, and I am going to deliver it up at once to Mr. Lynn."

Joyce was thankful to hear that some one was going to Lynncourt.

Would he be away long? Aunt Lotty inquired. No longer than it would take him to walk there and back. It was impossible to have the horses out on account of the snow. However, he should merely give the packet into Mr. Lynn's hands and return at once.

He departed, and Joyce and Aunt Lotty remained in their restless, nervous state of apprehension, listening to every sound, and opening the door every time there was the least noise in the hall.

In less than an hour there was a ring at the door-bell. It must be Mr. Carmichael. Aunt Lotty and Joyce rushed to the door before Empson had time to make his appearance, and on opening it discovered Mr. Carmichael and Mr. Gresford Lynn, with alarm visibly depicted in their countenances.

"She's not at Lynncourt," said Mr. Lynn, in a hoarse voice in answer to Joyce's eager questions, "she's not been there. My men are out in every direction. Have you the faintest idea which way she would take?"

"No."

"Empson," shouted Mr. Carmichael, "tell them to get lanterns and search everywhere about the field and grounds. We cannot find Miss Carmichael."

"We must go, too," he added, turning to Mr. Lynn.

They were moving away when a sudden inspiration came to Joyce; she flew after Mr. Lynn.

"Stay, stay," she exclaimed, "there is one hope. Have you been to the station?"

"The station!" he echoed, in extreme surprise.

"The station," repeated Joyce. "Mr. Lynn, I think that Doris has gone away."

When Joyce came quietly to consider her inspiration, though she wondered at it, she was inclined to put strong faith in it, the remembrance of Doris's vehement kiss occurring to her.

"She kissed me, too," said Aunt Lotty. "Joyce, dear, do you think it was for goodbye?"

How were Mr. Lynn and Mr. Carmichael speeding?

The station-master did not know Miss Carmichael by sight. He did not recollect that any lady had gone by the train. He had issued no first-class tickets that day.

"Any tickets at all?"

“Yes, one second-class to London by the 1.20 train.”

“Who took it?”

He could not remember, there was a great hurry, for a good many people got out, and the train was behind time.

A boy who was standing by said he had seen a young lady in black on the platform before the train came in, and he did not see her afterwards.

Mr. Carmichael made minute inquiries. He decided, after cross-examining the boy, that the young lady was Doris. And that she had gone to London.

She was doubtless on her way back to Devonshire. They should soon find her. Nothing could be done that night, they must start by the first train in the morning. So Mr. Lynn went home to read the packet that Mr. Carmichael had given to him. And Mr. Carmichael returned to Green Oake.

“Lucy Gray” vanished altogether from Aunt Lotty’s thoughts as she listened to Mr. Carmichael’s account, but new fears arose as great as those that had been dispelled. She was happier half an hour later, when Joyce knocked at her door.

Looking into Doris’s drawers to see if she had taken anything with her, Joyce had found a slip of paper, with a few words hurriedly written in pencil.

“Don’t be frightened; I shall be quite safe.”

When Joyce returned to the porch-room, she sat down

and wrote a long letter to Mr. Chester. He was at Rome.

Then she unclasped her diary and made the following entry:—

My story still runs on. How little I thought when I began to weave in my brain, that it would have taken such wild twists and turnings.

I have led so quiet and eventless a life myself, that it has hitherto seemed to me that only in tales of fiction could anything extraordinary occur.

I wander in memory to the pleasant house, with its bow-windowed room looking on the well-kept garden, that sloped down the edge of the river; to the monotonous routine of the every-day life of my father and myself, for my mother died when I was but young, and we two were left to take care of one another.

How one day passed scarce differing from its neighbour!—how calm and full of rest! As those days rise before me, I seem to be looking on a mellow painting—a peaceful landscape with a cloudless sky and unruffled waters. No startling effect, no sudden lights and shadows; ever the sun shining down, and brightening with its kindly rays each twig and leaf.

Then I gently sailed down Time's stream, with never a fear lest the wind might change. My father stood at the helm, and steered the vessel; and I, all-confident in his skill, was content and trusting. No doubts distressed me, no

discrepancies annoyed, no extraordinary incidents marred the smooth even tenour of my life, which sped on tranquilly, peacefully, and in my books alone I looked for the wonderful.

True, I spent many an hour by the dear old river, fancying all sorts of marvels till I almost believed in them. Now there were fairies hiding in the flower-crowned inlets, and I heard them rustling amongst the reeds, or pluming their wings for an expedition against the great dragon-fly that was darting amongst the flags and rushes. Now I pictured Hylas floating down the stream, or wept over the fate of Hyacinthus, reverencing, for his sake, the fair fragrant blossoms. Then again, half-closing my eyes, I beheld in my day-vision the carriage-and-four that took Cinderella to the ball approaching; and I mentally stepped into it, and it bore me to the palace of the Beast, where, like Beauty's father, I gathered one of the roses growing there. And lo! instead of the Beast, out rushed Blue Beard, and instantly I was on the topmost tower of the castle; leaning over the battlements with Sister Anne, and waving a signal to the horsemen who were coming in the cloud of dust.

These were my departures from matter-of-fact life, but then I knew that they were departures, and not parts of it; and yet when I awoke from my childish reveries, I felt as if I had been in another world.

But this was all very different from romantic adventures occurring in every-day life, and actually being as substantial facts as the most common-place incidents of the most

monotonous existence could be. And now I seem to have a second awaking, and the matter-of-fact life appears as the dream part of my existence, and the strange unlooked-for events the real and substantial portion.

Ah! is not reality more romantic than romance itself?

I wonder at Doris's courage in daring to take this journey; forgetting how much more independent her life has hitherto been than mine,—forgetting the hardships she and her mother have passed through, making her older and wiser than her years,—forgetting how they have been their own helpers, battled through their troubles alone, and acted on their own responsibility. All this makes Doris braver than I should be; and the more I ponder upon it, this flight of hers that at first seemed so extraordinary, strikes me now as a much more ordinary kind of occurrence.

She says that she shall be safe, and something tells me I may believe it.

Yet wherefore has she gone?

Why she will not accept an explanation that is so natural, so straightforward, I cannot understand. The evidence is clear, and yet some intuition of her own is stronger to her mind than facts which to me would be incontrovertible.

If I were inclined to jest to-night, I should say, "You are a true woman, Doris, so unreasonable, so illogical."

But I cannot jest; I think of the poor little thing fleeing away into the dark night, taking her sorrow and her distrust with her, and pity overpowers any criticism I might be

inclined to make upon what I cannot help considering her wilful perversity.

The candle is burning low; I must put away my pen. I wonder how I shall sleep to-night? I wonder, too, what Mr. Chester will think of my letter?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE POOR WIFE'S STORY.

MR. GRESFORD LYNN paced up and down his room. The packet lay on the table.

More than once he had approached to take it up and open it; but irresolution prevailed, and he resumed his agitated walk.

And yet his heart yearned to read the record of his lost wife's life, though he shrank from the first unclosing of the packet, and from letting the first ray of light fall upon the sorrows of that patient heart.

Oh, that the past could be recalled! Why had she not waited?

And for the last seven years she had lived within two hundred miles of him. She had died, and his neighbour had been at her deathbed, and yet he, her husband, had not known of it.

He chafed under the thought. It was madness to him; his heart-strings seemed stretched as though the next moment they would snap, the tension was so great. He writhed in mental agony, and great drops of perspiration rolled from his forehead.

He took the packet in his hand.

John Gresford Lynn. Her writing! Ellen's fingers had traced it. O wife! O wife!

Then he rose up again. He locked the door that he might not be disturbed, and returning to the table set himself to his painful task. Painful, and yet he felt strange comfort in being allowed thus, as it were, to hold communion with the dead.

Lovingly, he, like Doris, left the little seal uninjured, as he opened the packet. After he had done this, he sat as one in a dream, with the contents spread out before him,—a collection of papers of different dates, much exceeding the original document that Mr. Chester had spoken of as having been committed to Doris's keeping. Probably added to as years went on, and evidently altered and corrected if one might judge from the sentences blotted out and parts torn off, leaving gaps here and there, which, however, did not interrupt the thread of the narrative.

Mr. Lynn drew his chair nearer the table, shaded the lamp, and began with the paper of oldest date.

My husband, my long-lost husband! O John, mourned as dead these many years, how cruel has fate been to us. How shall I tell you all I wish to say—all that may make you feel happier when you look upon these lines?

Long have I communed with myself whether to leave you in ignorance of my lot, and to let you still believe that the

monotonous existence could be. And now I seem to have a second awaking, and the matter-of-fact life appears as the dream part of my existence, and the strange unlooked-for events the real and substantial portion.

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Long have I communed with myself whether to leave you in ignorance of my lot, and to let you still believe that the

waters were sweeping over your Ellen's grave. Then, again, I have thought that in years to come, should you live after me, that it might be a comfort to you to know that your wife was spared a cruel death, and that she died peacefully, blessing you with her last breath.

O John, through many and many a year I have thought ever of you, ever grieving over the dreadful death I believed was yours. The native who alone returned from that unfortunate expedition described how he had seen you murdered and left a mangled corpse upon the shore. And when I think of the horror that has been upon me night and day as I have thought upon the fearful scene,—when, with the overwhelming tidings of your being still alive, that awful picture fled away, and for a moment every other feeling was lost in overpowering thankfulness, it seems to me that when you know I was not drowned at sea, you, too, may be freed from a long-haunting horror.

For one moment my feeling was of thankfulness so profound that I forgot all else; and then I read how you had been a prosperous man, and were living happily with your wife and children.

And then—O John! there came upon me a flood of anguish that well nigh drove me mad. O John, I thought I could not bear it. I thought that I must rise up that very instant and flee to you. I know not how I passed that day, nor the days that followed it, nor how in my distraction I was kept from betraying my secret. Yet so it was; none

knew beside myself how that the iron had entered into my soul.

I read my brother's letter over and over, and I saw that he knew not of our marriage. And then my better spirit wrestled mightily within me, and I prayed that I might have strength to keep my secret to myself, and never harm your new-found happiness. O John, it was not that I did not love you; it was that I loved you better than myself, and so for your sake could bear that which for my own sake I should not have had the strength to struggle with.

I would not harm you; I would cause no sorrow to you or yours. To you I would lie buried in the depths of the ocean. I knew from my brother's letter that you and he were still at enmity, and that no word of me would pass from him to you.

Perhaps, too, I thought you had forgotten me, and loved this stranger better than the love of other days. That thought was agony. And yet I loved you with a love so enduring that it swept the bitterness away, and I felt that in the end I could conquer.

And two voices seemed striving within me, and one said to the other,—

“I must go to him. He is mine—my husband, and none other's. I must go to him, or die!”

And the other voice answered:

„He has believed thee dead long ago. He is at peace now; why wouldest thou disturb his happiness? why unseal

the tomb, and, like a risen tenant of the grave, spread dismay? Dost thou not think more of thyself than of him? Answer!"

And the first voice answered:

"It is because I love him; it is for his sake I would go to him, for he loves me."

But the other voice kept to its one note:

"It is thyself thou lovest, and not him."

So the two voices strove against each other, contending fiercely, and I endured, till, worn out with the strife, I fell ill.

For days I lay hovering between life and death; my frame exhausted, and with scarce strength to lift my head from my weary pillow, and I longed to die.

Then in the night season the angels visited me; I could not see them with my earthly vision, yet I knew they were there—ministering spirits sent from the Throne.

O ye who do not believe in such ministrations, ye should pass through my experience; ye should feel the heavenly peace that fell upon my soul. It seemed as though all earthliness had passed away, and that I breathed a purer atmosphere, that the spirit that had wrestled with the poor, weak flesh had triumphed, and stood like Michael, the archangel, with his foot upon the evil one. And I was able to say, "Victory!"

Then, faint and feeble, I fell back, overcome with the

effort, but angelic arms were around me, bearing me up, and pouring into my fainting heart the peace that passeth all understanding.

At last I rose from my bed of sickness, and turned to the duties of life. One shadow was removed, but another had fallen across my path. I tried to think it less dark, but, somehow, it was harder to bear, and everything around me seemed dimmed and faded, but perhaps I was weaker. But I had prayed for strength to bear it, and strength was given——

Here the page was torn. Mr. Lynn took up another paper, the beginning of which had also been torn away, and there were many erasures and lines blotted out in it. It began:

After the tidings of your death, I remained for many months with the Bargraves; my little baby—my Doris, was so ill, that I feared I should lose her as well as you. Perhaps her illness saved my life, for if I had had no object that needed my care grief had surely killed me. But I roused myself for her sake.

The Bargraves did all they could, and wished me to stay on with them, but I determined to return to England with my child, and there in some quiet village end my days in obscurity. It seemed to me, if I could only flee away from all associations with the past, if I could break every tie that linked me in any way with my friends or my former life, that I could, perhaps, look upon the past

as a dream, and could live in some new place a life of endurance.

And, so, I sailed for the old country,—not to return to the old home, the old haunts. No; I would not go north, where I had lived before, but to the south; I had read of quiet villages where I thought I should be able to commence a new life, with nothing to remind me of other days.

My name was down in the passengers' list as Ellen Carmichael, for I had resolved to take my maiden name again, since I could not now bear to hear the name of Gresford uttered by those around me, it seemed like profanity; and, so, my brother reading it, and not knowing of our marriage, believed me to be Ellen Carmichael still.

We started with a fair wind, and for several days all went well with us. But on the fourth day the clouds began to lower, and we knew a storm was coming on. The sky grew blacker and blacker, and an awful stillness fell around. It seemed as though walls of iron were closing in on all sides and pressing round the vessel till they seemed to stifle us.

The captain's voice sounded hollow as he gave his orders.

The sails were furled as by a phantom crew, for the men worked silently and held their breath. They knew what was coming.

There were some mothers beside myself on board, and we drew nearer together, and clasped our children in our arms.

We did not speak.

They prayed.

And I prayed, but my prayer was not as theirs; I prayed:

“O Lord, in mercy, take me to Thyself.”

I felt no fear, for what had I to live for?

But my prayer was not granted.

Neither was theirs.

Then came a sudden crash, as though the black walls were split in twain by the lurid lightning stroke. And the wind arose, and the storm burst over us.

The thunder rolled, crash upon crash, and deafened us, so that none could hear the words that the others spoke. And never but in the quick flash of the lightning could I see my companions' horror-stricken countenances.

A young Frenchwoman was sitting next to me; her child, about the age of my little Doris, was asleep in her arms, and ever as the peals of thunder sounded nearer, she crept closer and closer to me, and I felt her clutch my dress—as if I could protect her!

Suddenly we heard above us, wilder than the storm, an awful cry.

The cry of men in distress.

I started to my feet: the Frenchwoman, still holding by my dress, followed me: and we groped our way on deck.

Never shall I forget the scene of confusion.

The ship had sprung a leak.

And there was no hope.

The captain stood calm, and was endeavouring to give his orders, but the men were uncontrollable.

In the brute agony of fear of death, in the mad wild desire for life, they fought and struggled for the boats. Despair had crushed humanity out of them. Each for the time would have been a murderer, if so he might save his own life.

Life! life! all for life!

And I was so weary of mine!

“Yea, a man will give all for his life.”

Oh, that I should have so seen it.

The storm was abating, but the ship was sinking.

The captain stood with a revolver in his hand guarding one small boat from the crew.

An old sailor and a cabin-boy, who alone had remained faithful to him, were at his side, and by the captain's order the Frenchwoman and myself were placed in the boat, for there was no time to lose.

Then the sailor stepped in and the boat was lowered; but, as we touched the water, in clearing the boat from its tackle, the sailor lost his balance, the rope that still held us

to the vessel snapped, and we were borne away upon the stormy waves.

The moon, that had half struggled through a rift in the clouds, was suddenly obscured, and we were in darkness.

We saw no more—we heard no more, except one terrible cry. We knew nothing save that we two, with our babes, were alone on the wide waters.

How the slight boat weathered that night was a miracle! And yet no miracle: it was the will of God.

I clasped my baby closer to my breast. I spoke a tender word to the poor Frenchwoman; and lest she should not hear my voice, I pressed her hand.

And she, stooping forward, kissed me.

Then we clung to the boat.

And the night wore on. The waters became gradually calmer, but still they heaved like the worn out sobbing of some mighty ocean giant.

And morning rose.

Why came those words to me?—

“Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left.”

Two living women and two living babes were in the boat at night, but the dawn saw only one living mother, one living child; the other two had perished!

Oh, God!—

Here the manuscript was again torn, and Mr. Lynn took up succeeding fragments also torn and much blotted, from

which he learned how his wife and Doris had been picked up by a Spanish vessel, and had been carried to Lisbon; how, after many difficulties, they made their way to England, and found a home in a secluded village in Devonshire, where his wife, learning the art of lace-making, had been able to support herself and child.

There she found, to a certain extent, rest for her aching heart; and a life of action had, in some degree, alleviated the sorrows of memory.

She determined to remain as one dead to all who might have any interest in her; therefore she never wrote to the Bargraves, preferring that they should think she had perished in the Albatross.

Once, only once had she departed from this determination; she was reduced to a state of great necessity,—her friend, Mrs. Chester, was dead, and she had no one to help her. By a strange chance she heard that her brother was living in England, and, pressed by want, she wrote to him for help; trusting, that after so many years he would forget his anger against her.

Her brother would not help her.

And in his letter she read of her husband's being alive, and that he was married again; and she discovered also that Hugh Carmichael was in ignorance of her being John Gresford's wife.

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Goddard, Julia Bachope,

Joyce Dormer's Story

Bd.: 1

Leipzig (1867)

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